WEIRD TERROR TALES

Winter No. 1

ACME 50c

THE DEAD—ALIVE
by NAT SHACHNER & ARTHUR L. ZAGAT

HE
by H. P. LOVECRAFT

THE BEAST OF AVEROIGNE
by CLARK ASHTON SMITH

DEAD LEGS
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WEIRD TERROR TALES

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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The Editor's Page

My Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary gives for the word, *terror*: "a state of intense fear"; and for *horror*: "painful and intense fear, dread, or dismay: CONSTERNATION." The two words are very similar, yet there will be times when one of the two seems to be more apt than the other. At the time of my birth, 1916, most people here in the United Sates experienced feelings of horror at the war that was going on in Europe, but relatively little terror. The non-combatant in France and Russia, etc., where the invading forces were at work, felt terror. The soldier in the field might experience terror at times, whatever his bravery, when the moment came; feelings of horror came in when he saw the results of war before him or around him.

There was a Reign of Terror in Ireland after the war, when the Black and Tans were sent there to loot, murder, torture, rape, and destroy, in what turned out to be the final British attempt to break the spirit of the Irish and make them totally subservient to England. The people of Ireland were terrorized, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, horrified, stated in the House of Lords (February 22, 1921): "What is being done in Ireland is exactly what we condemned the Germans for doing in Belgium."

Most people in England, Scotland, and Wales had no idea of what was going on; and the government was also carrying on a propaganda campagin depicting the Irish as perpetrating atrocities against the "law and order" forces of the United Kingdom, and against each other, in an attempt to siphon off any sympathy which might result from leakage of the truth about what the Black and Tans were doing.

The difference between this and the subsequent similarities in Russia, Italy, and Germany, is that when the truth came out, the British people were not only horrified (as, no doubt, were many individual Russians, Italians, and Germans, when they learned what their governments were dong) but that they would not accept it--that is, they would not consider it justified and uphold it. The report of the American Commision on Conditions in Ireland, left Lloyd George's government no excuses, and the result was that the British Parliament passed a "Home Rule Bill" for Ireland--such as Parnell and Gladstone had vainly striven for in the 19th century--in the spring of 1921; and recognition of independence for Eire, the Irish Free State, the next year.

So we have terror as a type of feeling, and horror as a feeling about terrible events.

Nonetheless, there does remain a certain community between the two words, a certain interchangeableness; and in the last analysis, whether a particular work of fiction is called

a terror or a horror story is pretty much a subjective matter. The person who applies the label may or may not give reasons for the choice which are convincing to *you*. A feeling of horror (consternation, repugnance, etc.) nearly always accompanies the terrible in some respect; and an element of fear, however slight (it depends upon how likely it seems to you that this, or something like it, may or might happen to you, yourself, or someone dear to you) nearly always accompanies the horrible.

Natural disaster can arouse both terror and horror, but the highest points of both are related to activities involving man's "inhumanity" to his fellows.

Briefly speaking, we might say that there are two main classifications of the terror tale: (a) stories dealing with the known (b) stories dealing with the unknown.

Stories based upon events in history, such as we have mentioned above, fall into the first classification; likewise stories dealing with the terrors such as we read about in the daily papers. Crime, psychotic behavior, what psychologists, etc., call "abnormal" manifestations of hate and destructiveness, reigns of terror either small or large–however little the "average" layman may understand these things, they remain among the known. You or I may not understand exactly how and why such things happen (and neither may the psychologist with his fancy labels and other paraphernalia, through which he may as easily be deceiving himself as expanding actual understanding) but we are forced

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DEAD LEGS

by Edmond Hamilton

EDMOND HAMILTON's first story was published by Farnsworth Wright in the August 1926 issue of *WEIRD TALES;* this was *The Monster-God of Mamurth.* The following issue saw the first installment of a three-part serial, *Across Space,* by the new author, and was the first of a long series (though not in the sense of a connected series) of what Wright called "weird-scientific" stories. He broke into *AMAZING STORIES* with *The Comet Doom* (January 1928) and soon became as popular with science fiction readers as he was with *WEIRD TALES* followers; in fact, it was seeing his *The Shot From Saturn* in the October 1931 issue of WT which finally induced me to try that magazine, and I'll always be grateful to EH for offering me that final spur. When Harry Bates started *STRANGE TALES,* Hamilton (who had appeared in *ASTOUNDING STORIES* earlier) was one of the top writers that Bates sought out, and there's little doubt but that we would have seen other stories by him there had the magazine lasted longer. As it stands, the present story is his sole appearance in ST's pages--but certainly a memorable one.

DALL WAS THE CALMER of the two who were waiting in the room, that night in 1931. He sat in his wheelchair with eyes impenetrable and face mask-like, his hands motionless on the blanket that covered his lower limbs. Carson, the other man, was patently nervous, glancing quickly toward the room's side door at the slightest sound.

The room in which Dall and Carson waited was a curious one. It had two doors, one at the side and one at the rear, and there were no windows. It was cement-floored, lit by concealed electric lights, and held only

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a few chairs, a desk and a squat steel safe. There came only the faintest murmur of street noises into it; and sounds from above indicated that the room was in the basement of the house. Both men sat in silence.

Dall might have been a sphinx of flesh placed in the wheelchair, so motionless was his attitude, but Carson's nervousness was visibly increasing. He jumped as there came finally a double knock at the side door.

Dall spoke briefly and a man entered who was younger than either of these two, and who had quick eyes and a panther-like build.

"Well, Dead Legs, we got Roper all right!" he addressed Dall excitedly. "He was trying to get out of town. Knew damned well that since we cleaned up his mob he hadn't a—"

"Not so much talk, Quinn," Dall interrupted crisply. "You've brought Roper here?"

"He's upstairs now—Burke and Spinetti guarding him," Quinn answered. "We had our taxi planted as you said and when he took it to the station we nabbed him right off without—"

"All right, that's enough!" Dall snapped. "Tell Burke and Spinetti to bring Roper down here."

Quinn departed, and when he returned a minute later three others were with him. Two hardfaced men were obviously the guards of the third, for their automatics were close against his back.

This third man was stalwart with a bull-like face flushed now to deep crimson. His eyes, as he entered, fastened like twin flames of fury upon the man in the wheelchair. His hands had been securely bound, but, nevertheless, Quinn and the other two watched him closely.

"So you got me, Dead Legs!" the prisoner said bitterly to Dall. "And you weren't even satisfied to have them put me on the spot straight but had them drag me down here to your hole for you to gloat over, eh?"

"I didn't have you brought here for gloating purposes, Roper," Dall answered evenly.

Roper seemed not to have heard. "It wasn't enough," he went on, "that you and your damned mob took my end of town and all my rackets from me, that you bought some of my men and had the rest shot—you had to get me here last of all and crow to me about it!"

"I've done no crowing yet," Dall said. "And you had your warning six months ago, Roper."

"Warning!" Roper's fury seemed to reach its climax. "A warning to give up the territory my gang had always had! A warning from a cripple, a man with dead legs, a man who's never walked!"

"And a warning that I've fulfilled to the letter!" Dall reminded him. "You know now that no one in this town can buck Dead Legs Dall."

"Then, damn it, why don't you get it over with?" demanded the raging Roper. "Why don't you give your guns the word?"

Dall smiled levelly. Because you're not going to be killed so soon, Roper. Before you die you're going to do me a great service—the greatest in the world."

Roper's laugh was ugly. "You're dreaming, Dead Legs. I'd die in torture before I'd do anything for you, and you know it."

"But you're going to do this for me whether you want to or not," Dall said, still smiling coldly. "It's a service for which I particularly chose you, Roper."

He leaned back in his wheelchair, his cold blue eyes on Roper's furious face. Quinn was listening, Burke and Spinetti still standing with weapons against their prisoner. At a little distance from the rest Carson was mopping his forehead, and his eyes had a nervous, desperate look.

Dall spoke again, more slowly, to Roper. "You know me, Dead Legs Dall, as every crook and almost every other person in this town knows

me. You know that I've never walked, that I was born with these dead, shriveled legs, that I've sat in a chair like this for thirty years.

"They started calling me Dead Legs when I was a kid over there in the slums. Sometimes they beat me, too, because I was helpless. I soon saw that the only way I could stand against them was to be smarter than they were, and I was that. And because I was, Dead Legs was soon running a gang of kids, and as they and I grew up we became a gang of men and of tough ones, too!"

It was as though Dall had forgotten Roper and the rest as he talked, his eyes seeming to stare back into the past for a moment.

"Dead Legs Dall Yes, as that I've worked my way up, until now I and my mob have a mortgage on this town. I've broken up every other gang here—with yours the last, Roper. I've come to the top, fought my way up, until now I've got more money and more power than I used to dream of having.

"But what good are they to me the way I am? How can I enjoy money or power when I'm chained to a wheelchair with these dead, useless legs of mine? They couldn't keep me from getting what I wanted, but they'll keep me now from enjoying it!"

"I'm glad you realize it, Dead Legs!" said Roper harshly. "When I pass out I'll be grinning to think how you hate those legs of yours that you'll die with!"

"But I don't intend to die with them, Dall said softly. "I've reached the top and all I need to enjoy life is legs—not dead, useless legs, but living ones, legs that I can walk and run and dance with. They're what I want and I've always found a way to get what I wanted.

He leaned toward Roper. "That's where you come in, Roper. You've got what I want—strong, healthy legs. And I'm going to take them from you for myself!"

"You're crazy!" Roper exclaimed. "You poor batty cripple, you've brooded over those dead legs of yours so long you're cuckoo on them!"

"Are you so sure?" smiled Dall. "Carson, come over here.

Carson approached slowly, glancing nervously from one to the other, and Dall gestured to him without turning from Roper.

"Do you recognize Carson? Dr. Robert Carson, one of the three greatest surgeons in this country?"

"What's he to me?" snarled Roper.

"He's going to be very much to you, Roper," Dall assured him, mockingly, "and to me, too. He's going to take those healthy legs of yours off you and put them on me."

"You poor fool!" Roper snarled derisively. "You're cuckoo, sure. You were born with those dead legs, and you'll die with them.

"I'll not!" Dall's voice cracked with the emphasis of a whip. "You're the fool, Roper. You think because such an operation would have been impossible yesterday it's impossible today! But it's not! Scientists and surgeons have been removing animal limbs and grafting new ones on for years, and now surgeons like Carson are beginning to do it with humans!

"Carson here has been able to graft fingers, hands. He can fasten the new limbs so that bone knits to bone; can tie and connect the nerve filaments, the arteries and veins; can graft new flesh to heal over the joint so that the new limbs are as usable as natural ones!

"Carson can do it, and Carson's going to—for I've got something on him that means death for him and disgrace for his family if I spring it. Carson's fitted up all he needs to operate with back in that room behind this, and has trained Burke and Spinetti here to act as his attendants while the operations are going on. And that's tonight!

"Yes, tonight! Carson will take off my dead legs above the knees. Then we'll take off your healthy legs and graft them at once onto my body. Then we'll bury what's left of you, Roper, under the cement floor over there in the corner. But why don't you laugh, Roper? Why don't you laugh at the impossibility of it?"

"It *is* impossible!" Roper cried hoarsely, beads of perspiration on his forehead. "I know you, Dead Legs—you're trying to torture me before you send me out! But the thing's not possible!"

Dall laughed. "You think it's not, Roper? But it is. Carson has done it many times with animals, and he can do it with humans. And then I'll be Dead Legs no longer. Think what it means, Roper; think of me able to walk and run wherever I want to, and on your legs!

"Why, it'll be rich, it'll be rare! Can't you see the humor of it, Roper? Everyone congratulating Dead Legs Dall on the marvelous cure effected, everyone seeing him run and walk and dance, and none of them ever suspecting that he'd doing it all on another man's legs, a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!"

"You hell-fiend!" shrieked Roper. "By God, you wouldn't dare do it!"

Ah, you're beginning to believe now? I see you are. But be fair, Roper. Your legs would do you no good buried over there under the floor with you. And they can do me a lot of good. Why, even walking about on Roper's legs will keep me laughing all the time! Any pair of

healthy legs would have been as good, but they wouldn't have the humor there would be in wearing Roper's legs!"

Roper lunged madly at the mocking Dall, straining at the bonds that held his hands, but Burke and Spinetti jerked him back.

From his chair Dall watched with eyes bright with interest, but beside him Carson was trembling violently.

"You demon!" Roper cried out. Then suddenly he broke down. "Dead Legs, you're not going to do a thing like that? I know we've fought and bumped off each other's men, but that's all in the game. But this would be different — hellish!"

"But the thing's impossible," Dall said, mockingly. "You remember that, Roper, you remember how sure of its impossibility you were just a little while ago. There's nothing to fear from a man gone cuckoo, is there? It's just poor nutty Dead Legs raving, so don't be afraid."

He turned to Carson. "Everything ready back in the operating room" he asked swiftly, gesturing toward the rear door.

Carson managed to nod, still trembling. "It's all ready. But Dall, this thing—

"Is going on, Carson!" Dall said with cold finality. "We've been over that ground." He turned back to Quinn and the two guards. "All right, boys, you can take Roper back there. Nothing to say before we start, Roper? No place you'd like to go afterward — on your legs?"

Roper raised his bound, trembling hands toward Dall as he was pulled away. "Yes, you can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You hear me? You'll walk on them to hell!"

Quinn had opened the rear door, through which could be glimpsed an operating-room with white tables and gleaming apparatus. The two guards were half carrying the struggling Roper, Carson following like a man in a nightmare and Dall coming last in his wheelchair. And, as the little party went through the door, Roper's ghastly cry rose to a screaming imprecation of hate.

"To hell, Dall! You'll walk on them to hell!" he shrieked. He was still shrieking as the door closed after them all

DALL STOOD — *stood* - on the steps of his house with Quinn and Burke. It was night, and a few feet below them the city's ceaseless currents of people and vehicles flowed along the bright-lit street. Dall was trembling inwardly with excitement and exultation, but outwardly was looking coolly along the street.

"You're sure you don't want any of us with you?" Quinn was asking. "First time you've been out, you know."

"I'll not need you, no," Dall told them. "This is a walk I want to take alone, Quinn, a walk I've been looking forward to for thirty years."

"Just as you say, Dead Legs," Quinn agreed. "Though it'd be no trouble to go along in case you wanted us."

"There's no need," Dall repeated. "And why call me Dead Legs now? The name hardly fits me now!"

Dall stepped down to the street, and Quinn and Burke watched from the steps as he walked casually down the street.

Each step was savored by Dall as a long-starved man might savor food. It was his dream come true, he told himself. He who had sat thirty years in a chair was walking along a street. Dall thought that some passersby looked curiously at him, and he smiled to himself. It had been weeks since word had gone forth that the useless limbs of Dead Legs Dall had been miraculously cured at last.

It was worth it all, Dall told himself as he went on. Worth the ghastly night in that white operating room, the gleam of instruments and smell of anesthetics and realms of cool unconsciousness in which only Carson's drawn white face intruded at times. Worth the red, aching pain of the weeks that followed, the utter immobility of so long and then the first stumbling attempts at walking, inside the house. Yes, worth it many times.

Dall had no objective as he walked along. It was enough for him to be merely walking, without aim or objective. Did any of these hurrying people about him, he wondered, know the true joy and pleasure of walking? They could not. They had not spent Dead Legs Dall's thirty years in a wheelchair.

He was walking, and walking on Roper's legs. The grim humor of that still tickled Dall's sardonic mind immensely. Roper—or all of Roper but his legs—lay deep under the re-cemented floor in the corner of his basement-office. But Roper's legs were living still and walking still, carrying Roper's worst enemy. Dall's pride expanded. What Dead Legs Dall wanted he took! Even new legs!

The hurrying people that brushed by him and the automobiles racing in the street beside him he looked on with a new eye. He had preyed upon them and their city with his criminal organization even when he was prisoned in a wheelchair. But now that Dead Legs Dall was dead of legs no longer, what might he not do! He could expand his organization to other cities, could expand it until—

Two women a little along the street screamed, their screams drowned in the next second by the squeal of brakes. Dall stood out in the middle of the street, and the taxi that had almost run him down when he had leaped suddenly into the street was skidding to a stop beside him. Its driver emerged red-faced with anger and bore down on Dall.

"What in hell's the matter with you, fellow?" he cried. "You saw me coming and jumped right out in front of me! Are you trying to kill yourself!"

Dall seemed dazed, bewildered, stupefied. "I didn't mean to do it!" he stammered, his eyes roving wildly now. "I just didn't mean—my legs seemed just to jump out with me in spite of myself."

"That's some story, that you jumped in spite of yourself!" the driver exclaimed. "I ought to take a good sock at you for—" He stopped suddenly, recognizing the man before him. "Why, it's Dead Legs Dall!" His tone was abruptly respectful, apologetic. "I heard you'd been cured, but I didn't recognize you, Mr. Dall. Of course I didn't mean any of that stuff for you—"

"It's all right—all right," Dall said. His one desire was to get away from the fast-collecting crowd. "My fault entirely." He regained the sidewalk and started on. The driver stared after him then returned to his cab. The crowd dispersed, and Dall walked on along the street.

But Dall was walking now in a daze. His mind was in sudden turmoil. What he had told the taxi driver was the truth: he had had no intention of leaping into the street; without command of his brain his legs had suddenly carried him directly in front of the onrushing cab! It was as though his legs had wanted to kill him, Dall thought.

Dall gripped himself. This would not do, he told himself. He was wrought up, nervous, and it was but natural that he should have made a misstep when walking, when legs and walking were so new to him. It was only that, could be only that. Yet back in Dall's mind persisted the thought that it had not been a misstep but a swift deliberate leap of his legs in spite of himself.

He thrust the thought back, and, as he walked on, he became once more master of himself. Every step he took his legs obeyed him. He could feel the hard sidewalk under his feet, could place each step as he wished. Dall breathed more easily. Nerves, that was all! It was but natural: one didn't often try walking for the first time—and with another man's legs! Dall even smiled.

His first confidence had almost entirely returned. He stepped unhesitatingly along once more. At that moment Dall saw thundering along

the street in his direction two heavy trucks, one trying to pass the other. Some instinct warned Dall or he felt the preparatory bunching of his legs under him. For as he grasped wildly at a lamp-post beside him, his legs shot out with him in a swift leap into the two trucks' path!

It was Dall's clutch at the lamp-post that saved him, for he managed to grasp it as his legs leaped with him and to hold to it until the trucks had passed. The effort of his legs to leap out stopped instantly, but Dall clung desperately to the lamp-post. He knew now! Undistinguishable sounds came from him.

Passerby who saw Dall clinging to the post desperately, with face deathly white and eyes terror-haunted, thought him drunk, apparently, and stared at him. Some stopped, and then a blue-uniformed policeman shouldered through them toward Dall.

"What's this – another hooch-fiend?" Patrolman Wheeler demanded sharply; then he recognized Dall. Respect tinged his manner. "What's the matter, Dead Legs?" he asked.

"Get me a taxi!" croaked Dall, clinging still to the post. "I've got to get home. I've got to get home!"

Wheeler signalled a passing cab. "What's the matter, legs go back on you?" he asked. "I heard you were cured, Dall, but you must have tried walking too soon. Got to get used to it, you know."

Dall managed to nod. "That's it, I guess. I've got to get used to it."

The cab drew up and Dall grasped its door-handle, held it tightly until he was inside. There was no need, for his legs stepped up with him quite normally, making no involuntary movements.

While the cab darted back along the street Dall clung tightly to the assist-straps. He was breathing fast, and his mind swirled chaotically with horror. He did not know the cab had stopped until its door opened.

Quinn and Burke were still up on the steps, and at his motion came running down to the cab. Both looked inquiringly at Dall.

"Grab my arms and don't let me go until we're inside the house," Dall told them. At the blank expressions he snarled with sudden fury, "Do as you're told, damn you! Hold my arms till I tell you to let go!"

Held on either side by the two he went up the steps into the house, His legs walked up with him quite naturally, obeying every command of his brain. There seemed no need of the two restraining men. Yet Dall did not tell them to release him until he was down in his basement-office with doors closed.

"Call Carson!" Dall ordered as he sank into a chair. "Tell him to come over here, and to come quick!"

While Quinn obeyed Dall sat in a chair, his mind awhirl with incoherent thoughts. There could be no doubt of it, he told himself; his legs had twice that night tried to bring death upon him, and chance alone had prevented it. It was his legs, and not he, that had each time sought to hurl him to death in the street! His legs! No, Roper's legs!

Dall's eyes sought the oblong of newer, whiter cement in the floor at the room's corner. Roper lay under that, he told himself. Roper could do him no harm. But Roper's legs? There came rushing to Dall's mind those last words Roper had shrieked as he had been dragged into that operating-room at the rear, his last yells of agony and hate.

"You can take my legs, Dall, but you'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

Dall's hands clenched his chair's arms until his knuckles showed white. He sought to command himself. This was all moonshine, superstitious folly into which he was working himself. Roper was dead, and how could Roper's legs retain the hate of their former owner? How could Roper's legs try to kill him?

But they *had* tried to kill him, and twice this night! The truth rose in Dall's mind and could not be smashed down by any effort of will. He was wearing the legs of Roper, of the man whose last cry had been one of hate for himself. And, though attached to him, the legs were not part of him, but part of Roper still. Part of Roper's being and part of Roper's hate!

"You'll walk on them to hell. You'll walk on them to hell—to hell—to—"

"Carson's here," Burke announced from the door.

"Send him in here at once!" Dall ordered

Carson entered, his face pale and his eyes straying despite himself to the oblong of white cement in the corner. With an effort of will he turned his gaze from it. "What's the matter, Dall?" he asked.

"Everything's the matter," Dall answered. "Roper's legs are trying to kill me." At Carson's stupefied expression, Dall's inner fury burst forth. "You heard me! Roper's legs are trying to kill me!"

Carson managed speech. "Now, Dall, calm down. You've been out for the first time and naturally you're wrought up."

"You fool!" said Dall bitterly. "Do you think I'm a nervous woman? I tell you I walked out tonight, and without any will of mine my legs jumped me out in front of a taxi! Only luck saved me! Five minutes

later they tried to leap with me in front of two trucks, and if I hadn't caught a post and hung onto it, it would have been all up.

"Neither time did I have the slightest intention of making such a jump, mind you! And don't tell me they were missteps, for they weren't. They were deliberate leaps on the part of my legs. Carson, you know how Roper hated me. Well, his legs retain that hate. They're trying to kill me!"

Carson had paled further as he listened, but he was still the calmer of the two.

"Dall, listen to me. You've gone through a big operation, the biggest ever heard of, and you've lain for weeks recovering from it. Then tonight you go out to take your first walk in the street and because your new legs play queer tricks on you, you jump to the fantastic conclusion that they're still Roper's legs and trying to kill you."

"But how explain it?" Dall insisted. "How explain that my legs acted without the slightest order from my brain?"

"Dall, if you had a tenth of my medical experience you'd know that even in normal persons the control of the brain over the limbs often has queer lapses. Why, when my foot goes to sleep, or when my legs cramp when swimming, what's that but a lapse of the brain's control over the limbs? Everyone's had such experiences.

"Then what of your case, in which you've actually had new legs attached to your body, new nerves knitting to nerves, and bone to bone? It stands to reason, Dall, that in such case your legs would pay even queerer tricks on you than in normal cases. Why, in walking you're using motor-nerves of your brain you never used before, so that at present your brain has an uncertain control over your legs."

"But that just proves what I've been saying," Dall exclaimed. "They're Roper's legs, and my brain can't control them all the time. Roper's last thought was hate of me, and of you, too, and his legs are still controlled by that thought!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Carson. "Dall, get up and walk slowly along the room here. I'll show you I'm right."

Dall rose and carefully stepped along the room's length, Carson watching his movements closely from the side. Dall walked like a man at the edge of a precipice, but his legs seemed to move normally enough.

As Dall stepped more confidently back along the room toward the surgeon, Carson nodded. "You see, there's nothing the mat—" he was saying, when abruptly Dall's foot shot out and tripped Carson so that

he fell to the floor! Instantly Dall's legs were lashing out in furious kicks at the fallen surgeon!

"My God, Dall!" cried Carson as he sought to rise against the shower of fierce kicks. "Get back. You're killing me!"

"I can't—the legs won't obey me!" Dall screamed, his face white and distorted. "Quinn—Burke—come here and get me!"

Quinn and Burke bursting into the room, halted in stupefaction at the sight of Dall kicking with terrific savagery at the prostrate Carson who was shielding his head with his arms and trying to regain his feet.

"Pull me away!" Dall shrieked to them. "Grab me and pull me away from him! Quick, you fools!"

Bewildered, Quinn and Burke rushed forward and grasped Dall's arms and jerked him from the fallen man. For a moment his feet still lashed out in vain kicks toward Carson and then ceased their movements.

Dall burst into a high-pitched, hysterical laugh. "Do you believe now, Carson? Roper's legs nearly got you that time! You performed the operation, you know. Roper hated you almost as much as me. Do you believe now these legs of mine are still Roper's legs?"

Carson was staggering up, his bruised face ghastly in expression. "Keep holding him," he implored Quinn and Burke thickly. "Don't let him—don't let *them* get at me! Oh, God, don't let Roper's legs get at me again!"

Dall managed to get some grip upon himself. "Burke, get Carson out to his car and take him home," he ordered his aide. "Quinn, you hold me here until they're gone and then go upstairs and get Spinetti."

Whimpering and shaking, the surgeon hastened from the room.

WHEN BURKE AND CARSON were gone, Quinn released Dall and hastened up to the house's upper floors. Left alone, Dall paced back and forth, his head throbbing wildly. He tried to think.

It was true, then! Impossible, insane, but true! Roper's legs, attached to his body, were still Roper's legs, and had tried to kill him and to kill Carson, too! And if he went alone into the street, if he went anywhere near danger, Roper's legs would carry him into the path of death. He must not go out alone; he must keep his aides always within reach! But was this the freedom Dead Legs Dall had dreamed of in his wheelchair?

Dall's legs seemed to obey him perfectly as he paced the room. But he knew—maddening thought!—they were but biding their time. When opportunity came they would try again to kill him. Was Roper laughing;

laughing somewhere in the beyond? Was Roper still screaming the words that seemed to enter his ears: "—walk on them to hell—walk on them to hell—"

With a start Dall found that he had stopped pacing the room and was standing in a corner. He was standing on the oblong of new, white cement beneath which Roper lay! With a hoarse cry Dall jumped back, clutching a chair. His legs had taken him, without his knowing it, to the tomb of the man of whom his legs had been part!

Was Roper laughing at him this moment? *Was* he? Dall set his teeth as Quinn returned with Spinetti. He was a fighter; he would fight this!

Quinn and Spinetti approached him with some awe. "My God, Dead Legs, Quinn was saying, "you were shouting there that these new legs of yours were still Roper's!"

Dall's cold eyes swept him. "What if they are?" he demanded bitingly. "My legs may be Roper's, but the rest of me is still Dall, and it's Dall's orders you obey, isn't it?"

Spinetti crossed himself furtively, his eyes fearful upon Dall, and Quinn's lean face was a shade paler. "I'm not bucking your orders, but this business kind of scares me," he declared. "When Roper's legs were put on you it was—

"That's enough from you, Quinn!" snapped Dall. "You and Spinetti take my arms and help me up to bed—and keep a tight hold on me going up the stairs."

It took several minutes for them to reach Dall's bedroom on the upper floor, Quinn and Spinetti gripping his arms tightly, though his legs made no untoward movements on the way. At Dall's command they stayed until he was in bed.

"Now I want you two to take turns sitting beside the bed here until morning," he told them. "If you see me make a move to get out of bed, grab me and hold me, do you hear?"

"Sure, we get it, Dead Legs," Quinn answered. At the name Dall's rage flamed. "And don't call me Dead Legs any more!" he shouted.

Yet, as he sank back, Quinn taking the chair for the first watch, the name rang still in Dall's ears. Dead Legs! The name that had been familiar to him since childhood, but that had now a secret significance. Dead legs, yes, but not now the shrunken limbs that had won him the name. Dead Legs because now he wore a dead man's legs, Roper's legs!

Roper's face seemed passing before him in the darkness, a grin of triumph upon it. Other faces passed, too, Carson's drawn one and Quinn's, but always foremost was Roper's. He could not see whether

the body below the face had legs, but Roper's face was clear—Roper's face—

Dall crashed to wakefulness to find himself struggling with Spinetti beside his bedroom window. Quinn was running in to answer Spinetti's shouts, and the two were holding him back from the window now. Then as Dall came to full wakefulness his struggles ceased.

"Sure would have thrown yourself right out this window if I hadn't been watching!" Spinetti exclaimed. "You sprang out and were almost to the window before I knew it!"

Dall managed to speak after a while. "Take me back over to bed, he told them, choking slightly. "Then you go down, Quinn, and call up Carson and tell him to come back here the first thing in the morning. You stay and watch me, Spinetti. I won't be sleeping again.

Despite Quinn's call it was not early morning but almost noon of the next day when Carson arrived. The surgeon's face was still deathly pale despite its bruises as he came into Dall's basement-office. This time as he entered with Quinn he did not glance hastily at the white rectangle in the cement floor of the corner, but gazed at it with a fixed, fascinated stare.

Dall watched him from his chair, his eyes red from sleeplessness, like Carson's, and his face pale, but set. He smiled grimly as Carson, when he caught sight of Dall, shrank instinctively back with sudden terror in his eyes.

"Don't be afraid, Carson," Dall said. "I had Quinn tie me in this chair before you came, and he'll not release me until you go.

"I'm not afraid," Carson said hoarsely. "I think I'm past fear by this morning, Dall."

"Take hold of yourself, man!" Dall commanded him. "We're in a jam, but I'm in it worse than you, and I'm not whining yet."

Carson smiled strangely. "You call it a jam! Dall, we've done a black thing, a thing of horror, and we're starting to pay for it! You're paying most, but even though you forced me to do my share of the thing, I'm paying, too!

"Dall, I've been thinking, I've been remembering those last words Roper shouted to you. 'You'll walk on my legs to hell!' I see that you remember them. You've been thinking of them, too. Well, that's what you're doing. You've got Roper's legs on you, and, somehow, God only knows, they're doing what Roper wanted to do—they are taking you and trying to take me to death!"

"Carson, I told you to take hold of yourself. What we've got to do

is to find some way of stopping this thing. You put Roper's legs on me. You've got to find some way of stopping these attempts of theirs to kill me!"

Carson stared haggardly. "Some way of stopping it? Dall, there is one way in which this can be stopped, and only one way."

"And what's that way?" Dall demanded.

Carson leaned tensely toward him. "That way is to take Roper's legs off you again!"

Dall exploded into fury. "Like hell! Do you think, Carson, I went through those weeks of aching pain to give up now? Do you think I'll surrender the legs I worked for and planned for and dreamed of having?"

"Dall, give them up," Carson urged. "It's the only way of saving you, of saving us both! I tell you, this thing has brought me almost to insanity. Roper's legs on your body, trying to kill you, trying to kill me—give them up. You'll be no worse off than before."

"I'll not do it!" gritted Dall. "What if they are Roper's legs and trying to kill me? I was never afraid of Roper himself, and I'm not afraid of his legs now even though they're on my body!"

Carson rose, his face a deathlier white than before and with a desperate resolve in his eyes.

"Dall, think! I'm the only surgeon living who will take them off for you! Any other would refuse and think you insane if you asked him to do it. And if you told your story they'd simply have you arrested and tried for murder. I'm the only one who can release you, the only one who can free you from these legs of Roper's that are trying to kill you.

"You're not fighting just Roper's legs, but Roper himself, man. Roper who, somehow, from somewhere out there, is trying to kill you with these legs of his you're wearing!"

"And I'll fight him!" cried Dall. "I took his legs and I'll keep them despite Roper and all the fiends of hell!"

"That's your last word?" Carson asked, his face strange, his eyes turning fixedly again toward the white oblong in the corner, and then back to Dall.

"My last word, yes. Dead Legs Dall keeps what he's got and has always done so!"

Carson went out without another word, walking stiffly and strangely, Quinn and Burke entered in answer to Dall's call, a hint of horror in their eyes as they met his.

"Spinetti's gone!" Quinn announced. "Must have beat it just now. He

was crazy afraid and babbling about devil's work this morning, and when I looked in his room now he and his things were gone."

"Damn him!" Dall exclaimed. "I'll show him he can't run out on me, devil's work or not. I'll have him back here in two days!"

"Want me to go out and get the boys started after him?" Burke asked. Dall looked levelly at him and laughed harshly.

"You'd like to get out, too, wouldn't you, Burke? And you, too, Quinn? Well, you're going to stay. No matter what devil's work there is, no matter if I came out of hell itself, I'm Dead Legs Dall and nobody in this town forgets it. Come over here and untie me!"

When Quinn and Burke had released him from the chair Dall stood up and walked back and forth. His limbs seemed to obey every command of his brain. Then suddenly like a flash they hurtled with him across the room to fling him with force against the wall!

Dall's outflung hands alone saved his head from crashing against the wall, but, as it was, he was jarred and bruised by the shock when Quinn and Burke reached his side and helped him up. He looked about him, half-stunned.

"Keep holding me!" he gasped to them. "They'll get me even in here if they can!"

"We can tie them together and put you in your old wheelchair," Quinn suggested. "That'll keep them from jumping around like that, and you'll still be able to move about."

"Go ahead, then," Dall ordered, his face ghastly. While Burke went for the wheelchair Quinn fastened his legs together.

When they had lifted him into the chair Dall lay back, breathing hard. The horror upon the faces of his two aides was now undisguised.

"Right back in the wheelchair again," said Dall bitterly. "All I need is the blanket over my legs once more."

He shouted with sudden madness. "Are you laughing at me now, Roper, whever you are? Damn you, are you laughing?"

"For God's sake don't talk that way, Dead Legs," Burke said. "My nerve's going as it is."

EVERYONE IS INVITED

To join in a free-for-all inquisition on the stories in this issue of WEIRD TERROR TALES in our readers' department: *The Star Chamber.* First reports next issue.

Dall lay back, the other two withdrawing a little from him. A succession of heavy notes of sound seemed beating in Dall's ears, methodical, steady. They changed from mere sounds into words, spoken words: "You'll walk on them to hell! You'll walk on them to hell!"

The words seemed to be crashing upon Dall from all sides by thunderous voices, yet somehow above all those voices came the screaming curse of Roper. Then Dall put his hands over his ears, but he could still hear the words pounding into his brain. And as he turned his head he could see the white rectangle in the floor at the corner, under which lay Roper—Roper—

The hoarse exclamations of Burke and Quinn pierced his mind and he woke to the realization that a convulsive movement of his bound legs had almost thrown him out of the wheelchair! He gripped the chair's arms just in time, holding on while his legs threshed wildly about. Quinn and Burke clutched the straining legs, held them, and in a moment they quieted.

For an hour following that Dall's legs were still, and then again they were kicking in wild efforts to throw him from the chair. Again Dall clung to the chair and fought them, with the other two aiding him. But when, in the half hour after that, the legs made two more attempts to hurl him out of the wheelchair, Dall felt his mind breaking and giving beneath the horror.

He fought the threshing and struggling of his legs, clinging wildly to the wheelchair from which they sought to throw him. It was only in an interval of this terrible struggle that he became aware that he was alone in the room, that Burke and Quinn had yielded to their terror and fled. In his struggle with his legs he had not heard the closing of the door.

"Damn you, come back!" he cried. "Quinn—you and Burke—I'll have you all bumped. I'm still Dead Legs Dall." There came no answer.

No answer but the silence of the white oblong in the floor at the room's corner. Dall shouted to it. "You've not got me yet, Roper! Your legs haven't got me yet! I can still beat you. I can have Carson take them off."

He wheeled himself to the desk, and, grasping the telephone, called a number. He shouted hoarsely to the man who answered, "Tell Carson that Dall wants him. Tell him Dall wants him over here at once!"

The voice that answered him was that of a well-trained servant, but it sounded strange. "But Dr. Carson can't come, sir. He's—"

"Tell Carson he's got to come!" Dall screamed into the instrument. "He's got to take Roper's legs off me, do you hear? Roper's here under the floor, but his legs are on me and he's got to take them off—take them off—"

"But Dr. Carson killed himself an hour ago, sir," the other said. "The police are here now. I'll tell them you want Dr. Carson if you—"

But Dall had hung up the receiver, was staring into blankness. Carson dead, Carson a suicide! He remembered Carson's white, strange face when the surgeon had left him. Carson was dead, the one man who could have taken Roper's legs from him! And even now those legs were again struggling, straining!

But there was a way out, even so! Dall wheeled his chair away from the desk, out into the room. Yes, a way out of the madness rapidly overtaking his brain! With legs still threshing and twisting he wheeled his chair toward the door of the operating room at the rear. He turned there to shake a trembling hand at the white-cement oblong in the floor back in the office's corner.

"You've not got me even yet, Roper, you hear? I'll beat you even now—even now." There was a hint of determination in Dall's wild mutterings

THE POLICEMEN AND reporters in the little crowd were talking in excited voices as they came down into the basement corridor of Dall's house and paused outside the door of his office. Their voices could be heard in snatches of sentences as they interrupted each other.

"—heard that Dead Legs had something on Dr. Carson for a long time, but never thought—"

"—butler said he screamed about Roper being buried under the floor in here and something about Roper's legs. We knew damned well Dall was the one who put Roper away, but couldn't pin—"

The police-captain in charge turned at the door. "Have your guns ready, there. We're going right in."

The door flew open from his kick and with pistols ready the policemen burst into Dall's office. A glance showed that he was not in it, but the door at its rear was open and in a moment they were through that. All stared about them for a moment at the elaborately-fitted little operating-room. Then they uttered cries of horror as they saw the wheelchair that stood beside an instrument-cabinet.

(Turn to Page 55)

THE HOUSE AND THE BRAIN

by Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BULWER-LYTTON (Edward George Earle Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton, 1803-1873) was noted for his historical novels, the most famous of which is *The Last Days of Pompeii,* as well as "occult" stories, particularly *Zanoni.* Of the present story, H. P. Lovecraft wrote (in *Supernatural Horror in Literature*): *"The House and the Brain,* which hints of Rosicrucianism and at a deathless and malign figure perhaps suggested by Louis XV's mysterious courtier St. Germain, yet survives as one of the best short haunted-house tales ever written." And he adds that the novel *Zanoni* (1842) "contains similar elements more elaborately handled . ." While we respect HPL's opinions, we would not present this present tale to you if careful re-reading had not confirmed it for us.

A FRIEND OF MINE, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest, "Fancy! since we last met, I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London."

"Really haunted?—and by what?—ghosts?"

"Well, I can't answer these questions; all I know is this—six weeks ago I and my wife were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, 'Apartments Furnished.' The situation suited us: we entered the house—liked the rooms—engaged them by the week—and left them the third day. No

power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer; and I don't wonder at it."

"What did you see?"

"Excuse me—I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer—nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an undefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be—and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said dryly, 'I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you.'

"'They—who?'" I asked, affecting a smile.

"'Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don't mind them; I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care—I'm old, and must die soon anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness, that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her farther. I paid for my week, and too happy were I and my wife to get off so cheaply."

"You excite my curiosity," said I; "nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously."

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight toward the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up—no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighboring areas, said to me, "Do you want any one at that house, sir?"

"Yes, I heard it was to let."

"Let!—why, the woman who kept it is dead—has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J——offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars for him, a pound a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not."

"Would not!—and why?"

"The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her."

"Pooh!—you speak of Mr. J——. Is he the owner of the house?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"In G—— Street, No.—."

"What is he?—in any business?"

"No, sir—nothing particular; a single gentleman."

I gave the pot-boy the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J——, in G—— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J—— at home—an elderly man, with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted—that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation—that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. "Sir," said Mr. J——, with great courtesy, "the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question—the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse, for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner's inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighborhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of it, much

more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent-free for a year to anyone who would pay its rates and taxes."

"How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?"

"That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is that my life has been spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company. I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, amongst whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repainting and roofing it — added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles — advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel retired on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day, and although they deponed that they had all seen something different, that something was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, or even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement. Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories — to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please."

"Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?"

"Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add, that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house."

"My interest *is* exceedingly keen," said I, "and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them — even in a haunted house."

Mr. J—— said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau, gave them to me, — and thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

IMPATIENT FOR THE EXPERIMENT, as soon as I reached home, I summoned my confidential servant—a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

"F——," said I, "you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition?——well, I have heard of a house in London, which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there tonight. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard—something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think, if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?"

"Oh, sir! pray trust me," answered F——, grinning with delight.

"Very well—then here are the keys of the house—this is the address. Go now—select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire—air the bed well—see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger—so much for my weapons—arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen."

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honor. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. The volume I selected was one of Macaulay's *Essays*. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely toward the haunted house. I took with me a favorite dog—an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier,—a dog fond of prowling about strange ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats—a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night, but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still there was a moon—faint and sickly, but still a moon—and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile. "All right, sir, and very comfortable."

"Oh!" said I, rather disappointedly; "have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?"

"Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer."

"What—what?"

"The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear—nothing more."

"You are not at all frightened?"

"I! not a bit of it, sir;" and the man's bold look reassured me on one point—viz., that, happen what might, he would not desert me.

WE WERE IN THE HALL, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation and followed me and F—— through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not winebibbers. For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little back-yard with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp—and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint—the foot of a child; the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning. We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground floor, a dining parlor, a small back parlor, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman—all still as death. We then visited the drawing-room, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an armchair. F—— placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so, a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and

dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

"Why, this is better than the turning-tables, said I, with a half-laugh — and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F——, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale blue misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet. "Put back that chair opposite to me," said I to F——; "put it back to the wall."

F—— obeyed. "Was that you, sir?" said he, turning abruptly.

"I — what!"

"Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder — just here.

"No," said I. "But we have jugglers present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*."

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms — in fact they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms — a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor — a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place — no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard, without locks, flush with the wall, and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards — only hooks to suspend female dresses — nothing else; we sounded the walls — evidently solid — the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F——, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. "Sir," said my servant in surprise, "I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for it is a—"

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a

single instant. The same thought seized both — some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small blank dreary room without furniture — a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner — a small window — the shutters closed — not even a fireplace — no other door but that by which we had entered — no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened: we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of undefinable horror. Not so my servant. "Why, they don't think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my foot."

"Try first if it will open to your hand," said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, "while I open the shutters and see what is without."

I unbarred the shutters — the window looked on the little backyard I have before described; there was no ledge without — nothing but sheer descent. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F—, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me, and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gaiety amidst circumstances so extraordinary compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest stick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain. As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landingplace. We both saw a large pale light — as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial — move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the

door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid; rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it—a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping-room. I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers: there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing—nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor—just before us. We went through the other attics (in all four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen—nothing but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand: just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bedchamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring; took them out, placed them on a table close at my bedhead, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

THE LETTERS WERE SHORT—they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love—some secret that seemed of crime. "We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember, "for how every one else would execrate us if all was known." Again: "Don't let any one be in the same room with you at night—you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't

be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words: "Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as—"

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvellous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself—laid the letters on the table—stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering—and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bedhead. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay. Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearth-rug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open; but no—it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table—softly, softly—no visible hand—it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other. I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round the floor—no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bedhead; my servant called out, "Is that you, sir?"

"No; be on your guard."

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backward and forward. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentrated all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognized him had we met in the streets, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, "Run—run! it is after me!" He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open,

and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling to him to stop; but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street door open—heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

IT WAS BUT FOR A MOMENT that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one—not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the *Thing*, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally striving to force his away into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly had bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognize me. Whoever has seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as if in the madness of hydrophobia, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light—the page was overshadowed: I looked up, and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself out of the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold

caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought—but this I cannot say with precision—that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I seemed to distinguish them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak—my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, "Is this fear? it is *not* fear!" I strove to rise—in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition—that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond men's, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally.* Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of men.

And now, as this impression grew on me, now came, at last, horror—horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said, "This is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear, I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion—I do not fear." With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand toward the weapon on the table: as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles—they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn: it was the same with the fire—the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these—"I do not fear, my soul does not fear;" and at the same time I found the strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows—tore aside the curtain—flung open the shutters; my first thought was—*light.* And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gaslamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow

very palely and partially — but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone — except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover — an old mahogany round table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person — lean, wrinkled, small too — a woman's hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table; hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud measured knocks I had heard at the bedhead before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many-colored — green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny Will-o'-the-wisps, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a Shape — a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life — ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned toward me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow — eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly — a man's shape — a young man's. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress; for both the male shape and the female though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable — simulacra — phantasms; and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpselike aspect and ghostlike stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a bloodstain on the breast of the female; and the phantom-male was lean-

ing on its phantom-sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up—they were gone! And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of a woman, aged. In her hand she held letters—the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letters and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned—bloated, bleached—seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse, and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished and it became a face of youth—hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth, and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow—malignant, serpent-eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them: larvae so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water—things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other—forms like nought ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentrated all my faculties in the single focus of resisting, stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow—above all, from those strange serpent eyes—eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in nought else around me, I was aware that there was a

will, and a will of intense, creative working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvae grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into thecandles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively niched himself, lay the dog. I called to him — no movement; I approached — the animal was dead; his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire; I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favorite — acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken — actually twisted out of the vertebrae. Had this been done in the dark? — must it not have been by a hand human as mine? — must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance — my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn; nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since — that is, it will go in a strange erratic way for a few hours, and then comes to a dead stop — it is worthless.

NOTHING MORE CHANCED for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Nor till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression — for which I could not account — that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena — if I may use the term — which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering

through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floor, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there. But he had not presented himself; nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool, to this effect:

"Honored Sir—I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think I deserve it, unless—which Heaven forbid!—you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne. The ship sails tomorrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy It is behind me. I humbly beg you, honored sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother's at Walworth—John knows her address."

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer's charge.

This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog's body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house I went to Mr. J——'s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determinted at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared, and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J—— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered, "I know but little of the woman's earlier history, except, as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died—you smile—what would you say?"

"I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency."

"What! you believe it is all an imposture? for what object?"

"Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake—tell you what money you had in your pocket—nay, describe your very thoughts—it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rapport*.

"That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe; some material force must have killed my dog; it might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog—had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will."

"It killed your dog! that is fearful! indeed it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Rats and mice are never found in it."

"The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man's reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?"

"Yes, though imperfectly—and I accept any crotchet (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts

and hobgoglins we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?"

"I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bedroom which I occupied, forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed—nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small backyard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building."

"And you think, if I did that—"

"You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations."

"Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest, allow me to write to you."

ABOUT TEN DAYS AFTERWARD I received a letter from Mr. J——, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters), she had married, against the wish of her relatives, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child about six years old. A month after the marriage, the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of "found drowned."

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child—and in the event of the child's death, the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterward—it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbors deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death, said that it was emaciated as

if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape—crept out into the backyard—tried to scale the wall—fallen back exhausted, and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterward. The widow was left in affluence; but reverses of various kinds had befallen her; a bank broke—an investment failed—she went into a small business and became insolvent—then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work never long retaining a place, though nothing peculiar against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J——had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J——added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house—we went into the blind, dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trapdoor, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some moldering furniture—three chairs, an oak settle, a table—all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank—costly steel

buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court-dresses—a handsome court sword—in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold-lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colorless volatile essences, of what nature I shall say no more than that they were not poisons—phosphor and ammonia entered into some of them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber—also a lodestone of great power.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second; it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid—on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round, but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A very peculiar, but not strong nor displeasing odor, came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterward discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odor, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room—a creeping, tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer.

An Eerie Tale of Witchcraft

SATAN'S SERVANTS
by Robert Bloch

appears in the November issue of

MAGAZINE OF HORROR

now on sale — or see page 125 of this magazine

As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilled—the saucer was broken—the compass rolled to the end of the room—and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trap door; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet; it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old Monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus:—"On all that it can reach within these walls—sentient or inanimate, living or dead—as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein."

We found no more. Mr. J—— burned the tablet and its anathema. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

MS. FOUND IN A BOTTLE

by Edgar Allan Poe

Qui n'a plus qu'un moment a vivre
N'a plus rien a dissimuler.
Quinault—Atys.

OF MY COUNTRY and of my family I have little to say. Ill-usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other. Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind enabled me to methodise the stores which early study very diligently garnered up. Beyond all things, the works of the German moralists gave me great delight; not from any ill-advised admiration of their eloquent madness, but from the ease with which my habits of rigid thought enabled me to detect their falsities. I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius; a deficiency of imagination has been imputed to me as a crime; and the Pyrrhonism of my opinions has at all times rendered me notorious. Indeed, a strong relish for physical philosophy has, I fear, tinctured my mind with a very common error of this age—I mean the habit of referring occurrences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science. Upon the whole, no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the

In July 1833, the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor,* (which is described by Hervey Allen in his still-impressive biography of EDGAR ALLAN POE, *Israfel*–1934 edition–as " an ephemeral weekly newspaper then edited by a Mr. L. A. Wilmer . . ") announced a prize contest. $50 would be awarded to the best short story and $25 for the best poem ". to be submitted within a given time." Mr. Allen notes that one of the judges, a Mr. Latrobe, misstated the amount of the prizes awarded, so that earlier biographers of Poe have written in all innocence that EAP received $100 for his prize winning tale, *Ms. Found in a Bottle.* Allen gives an excerpt from the judges' account of the contest, from which we see that most of the entries were brutal rubbish, just as are most entries in story contests today. The judges were about to declare "no contest" in despair when a small, quarto-bound book was noticed, and this turned out to be a neatly handprinted collection of stories by one Mr. Poe. They had not read very far into the first of these before it was obvious to all that a winner was here; the only debating point was: Which? It finally came down to a choice between *Ms. Found in a Bottle,* and *A Descent into the Malestrom.* A mss. of a poem by EAP, *The Coliseum,* was also a strong contender for the poetry prize, but here another poem by a different writer was found, in the judges' opinion, to have sufficient excellence so that they could absolve themselves of not passing up the Poe poem due to bias in his favor. The title on the little volume that Poe submitted was *The Tales of the Folio Club,* and his prize story was published in an October, 1833 issue of the newspaper.

There is a curious footnote to the story in the 1927 Walter J. Black edition of Poe's *Collected Works:* "The *Ms. Found in a Bottle,* was originally published in 1831, and it was not until many years afterward that I became acquainted with the maps of Mercator, in which the ocean is represented as rushing, by four mouths, into the (northern) Polar Gulf, to be absorbed into the bowels of the earth; the Pole itself being represented by a black rock, towering to a prodigious height. E.A.P." Did Poe's memory confuse the date when the story was first published (1833) with, possibly, the date when it was written (1831)? Or did, perhaps, he consider this little handprinted collection of tales its first publication? Perhaps some reader more learned than your editor can throw some light on the question.

ignes fatui of superstition. I have thought proper to premise thus much, lest the incredible tale I have to tell should be considered rather the raving of a crude imagination, than the positive experience of a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity.

After many years spent in foreign travel, I sailed in the year 18—, from the port of Batavia, in the rich and populous island of Java, on a

voyage to the Archipelago Islands. I went as passenger—having no other inducement than a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me as a fiend.

Our vessel was a beautiful ship of about four hundred tons, copper-fastened, and built at Bombay of Malabar teak. She was freighted with cotton-wool and oil, from the Lachadive Islands. We had also on board coir, jaggeree, ghee, cocoanuts, and a few cases of opium. The stowage was clumsily done, and the vessel consequently crank.

We got under way with a mere breath of wind, and for many days stood along the eastern coast of Java, without any other incident to beguile the monotony of our course than the occasional meeting with some of the small crabs of the Archipelago to which we were bound.

One evening, leaning over the taffrail, I observed a very singular isolated cloud, to the N. W. It was remarkable, as well from its color as from its being the first we had seen since our departure from Batavia. I watched it attentively until sunset, when it spread all at once to the eastward and westward, girding in the horizon with a narrow strip of vapor, and looking like a long line of low beach. My notice was soon afterward attracted by the dusky-red appearance of the moon, and the peculiar character of the sea. The latter was undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent. Although I could distinctly see the bottom, yet, heaving the lead, I found the ship in fifteen fathoms. The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive. The flame of a candle burned upon the poop without the least perceptible motion, and a long hair, held between the finger and thumb, hung without the possibility of detecting a vibration. However, as the captain said he could perceive no indication of danger, and as we were drifting in bodily to shore, he ordered the sails to be furled, and the anchor let go. No watch was set, and the crew, consisting principally of Malays, stretched themselves deliberately upon deck. I went below—not without a full presentiment of evil. Indeed, every appearance warranted me in apprehending a Simoon. I told the captain of my fears; but he paid no attention to what I said, and left me without deigning to give a reply. My uneasiness, however, prevented me from sleeping, and about midnight I went upon deck. As I placed my foot upon the upper step of the companion-ladder, I was startled by a loud, humming noise, like that occasioned by the rapid revolution of a mill-wheel, and before I could ascertain its meaning, I found the ship quivering to

its center. In the next instant a wilderness of foam hurled us upon our beam-ends, and, rushing over us fore and aft, swept the entire decks from stem to stern.

The extreme fury of the blast proved, in a great measure, the salvation of the ship. Although completely water-logged, yet, as her masts had gone by the board, she rose, after a minute, heavily from the sea, and, staggering awhile beneath the immense pressure of the tempest, finally righted.

By what miracle I escaped destruction, it is impossible to say. Stunned by the shock of the water, I found myself, upon recovery, jammed in between the stern-post and rudder. With great difficulty I regained my feet, and looking dizzily around, was at first struck with the idea of our being among breakers; so terrific, beyond the widest imagination, was the whirlpool of mountainous and foaming ocean within which we were engulfed. After a while I heard the voice of an old Swede, who had shipped with us at the moment of leaving port. I hallooed to him with all my strength, and presently he came reeling aft. We soon discovered that we were the sole survivors of the accident. All on deck, with the exception of ourselves, had been swept overboard; the captain and mates must have perished while they slept, for the cabins were deluged with water. Without assistance we could expect to do little for the security of the ship, and our exertions were at first paralyzed by the momentary expectation of going down. Our cable had, of course, parted like packthread, at the first breath of the hurricane, or we should have been instantaneously overwhelmed. We scudded with frightful velocity before the sea, and the water made clear breaches over us. The framework of our stern was shattered excessively, and, in almost every respect, we had received considerable injury; but to our extreme joy we found the pumps unchoked, and that we had made no great shifting of our ballast. The main fury of the blast had already blown over, and we apprehended little danger from the violence of the wind; but we looked forward to its total cessation with dismay; well believing, that in our shattered condition, we should inevitably perish in the tremendous swell which would ensue. But this very just apprehension seemed by no means likely to be soon verified. For five entire days and nights—during which our only subsistence was a small quantity of jaggeree, procured with great difficulty from the forecastle—the hulk flew at a rate defying computation, before rapidly succeeding flaws of wind, which, without equalling the first violence of the Simoon, were still more terrific than any tempest

I had before encountered. Our course for the first four days was, with trifling variations, S. E. and by S.; and we must have run down the coast of New Holland. On the fifth day the cold became extreme, although the wind had hauled round a point more to the northward. The sun arose with a sickly yellow lustre, and clambered a very few degrees above the horizon—emitting no decisive light. There were no clouds apparent, yet the wind was upon the increase, and blew with a fitful and unsteady fury. About noon, as nearly as we could guess, our attention was again arrested by the appearance of the sun. It gave out no light, properly so called, but a dull and sullen glow without reflection, as if all its rays were polarized. Just before sinking within the turgid sea, its central fires suddenly went out, as if hurriedly extinguished by some unaccountable power. It was dim, silver-like rim, alone, as it rushed down the unfathomable ocean.

We waited in vain for the arrival of the sixth day—that day to me has not yet arrived—to the Swede never did arrive. Thenceforward we were enshrouded in pitchy darkness, so that we could not have seen an object at twenty paces from the ship. Eternal night continued to envelope us, all unrelieved by the phosphoric sea-brilliancy to which we had been accustomed in the tropics. We observed, too, that although the tempest continued to rage with unabated violence, there was no longer to be discovered the usual appearance of surf, or foam, which had hitherto attended us. All around were horror, and thick gloom, and a black sweltering desert of ebony. Superstitious terror crept by degrees into the spirit of the old Swede, and my own soul was wrapt in silent wonder. We neglected all care of the ship, as worse than useless, and securing ourselves as well as possible, to the stump of the mizzen-mast, looked out bitterly into the world of ocean. We had no means of calculating time, nor could we form any guess of our situation. We were, however, well aware of having made further to the southward than any previous navigators, and felt great amazement at not meeting with the usual impediments of ice. In the meantime every moment threatened to be our last—every mountainous billow hurried to overwhelm us. The swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible, and that we were not instantly buried is a miracle. My companion spoke of the lightness of our cargo, and reminded me of the excellent qualities of our ship; but I could not help feeling the utter hopelessness of hope itself, and prepared myself gloomily for that death which I thought nothing could defer beyond an hour, as, with every knot of way the ship made, the swelling

of the black stupendous seas became more dismally appalling. At times we gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatross—at times became dizzy with the velocity of our descent into some watery hell, where the air grew stagnant, and no sound disturbed the slumbers of the kraken.

We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when a quick scream from my companion broke fearfully upon the night. "See! cried he, shrieking in my ears, "Almighty God! see! see!" As he spoke I became aware of a dull sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm where we lay, and threw a fitful brilliancy upon our deck. Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood. At a terrific height directly above us, and upon the very verge of the precipitous descent, hovered a gigantic ship of perhaps four thousand tons. Although upreared upon the summit of a wave more than a hundred times her own altitude, her apparent size still exceeded that of any ship of the line or East Indiaman in existence. Her huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from the polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns which swung to and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane. When we first discovered her, her bows were alone to be seen, as she rose slowly from the dim and horrible gulf beyond her. For a moment of intense terror she paused upon the giddy pinnacle as if in contemplation of her own sublimity, then trembled, and tottered, and—came down.

At this instant, I know not what sudden self-possession came over my spirit. Staggering as far aft as I could, I awaited fearlessly the ruin that was to overwhelm. Our own vessel was at length ceasing from her struggles, and sinking with her head to the sea. The shock of the descending mass struck her, consequently, in that portion of her frame which was nearly under water, and the inevitable result was to hurl me, with irresistible violence, upon the rigging of the stranger.

As I fell, the ship hove in stays, and went about; and to the confusion ensuing I attributed my escape from the notice of the crew. With little difficulty I made my way, unperceived, to the main hatchway, which was partially open, and soon found an opportunity of secreting myself in the hold. Why I did so I can hardly tell. An indefinite sense of awe, which at first sight of the navigators of the ship had taken hold of my

mind, was perhaps the principle of my concealment. I was unwilling to trust myself with a race of people who had offered, to the cursory glance I had taken, so many points of vague novelty, doubt, and apprehension. I therefore thought proper to contrive a hiding-place in the hold. This I did by removing a small portion of the shifting-boards, in such a manner as to afford me a convenient retreat between the huge timbers of the ship.

I had scarcely completed my work, when a footstep in the hold forced me to make use of it. A man passed by my place of concealment with a feeble and unsteady gait. I could not see his face, but had an opportunity of observing his general appearance. There was about it an evidence of great age and infirmity. His knees tottered beneath a load of years, and his entire frame quivered under the burden. He muttered to himself, in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, and groped in a corner among a pile of singular-looking instruments, and decayed charts of navigation. His manner was a wild mixture of the peevishness of second childhood, and the solemn dignity of a God. He at length went on deck, and I saw him no more.

* * * * * * * * * *

A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul—a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of by-gone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key. To a mind constitued like my own, the latter consideration is an evil. I shall never—I know that I shall never—be satisfied with regard to the nature of my conceptions. Yet it is not wonderful that these conceptions are indefinite, since they have their origin in sources so utterly novel. A new sense—a new entity is added to my soul.

* * * * * * * * * *

It is long since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think, gathering to a focus. Incomprehensible men! Wrapped up in meditations of a kind which I cannot divine, they pass me by unnoticed. Concealment is utter folly on my part, for the people *will not* see. It is but just now that I passed directly before the eyes of the mate; it was no long while ago that I ventured into the captain's own private cabin, and took thence the materials with which I write, and have written. I shall from time to time continue this journal. It is

true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor. At the last moment I will enclose the MS. in a bottle, and cast it within the sea.

* * * * * * * * * *

An incident has occurred which has given me new room for meditation. Are such things the operation of ungoverned chance? I had ventured upon deck and thrown myself down, without attracting any notice, among a pile of ratlin-stuff and old sails, in the bottom of the yawl. While musing upon the singularity of my fate, I unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly-folded studding-sail which lay near me on a barrel. The studding-sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out in the word *Discovery.*

I have made my observations lately upon the structure of the vessel. Although well armed, she is not, I think, a ship of war. Her rigging, build, and general equipment, all negative a supposition of this kind. What she *is not,* I can easily perceive; what she *is,* I fear it is impossible to say. I know not how it is, but in scrutinizing her strange model and singular cast of spars, her huge size and overgrown suits of canvas, her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, there will occasionally flash across my mind a sensation of familiar things, and there is always mixed up with such indistinct shadows of recollection, an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago.

I have been looking at the timbers of the ship. She is built of a material to which I am a stranger. There is a peculiar character about the wood which strikes me as rendering it unfit for the purpose to which it has been applied. I mean its extreme *porousness,* considered independently of the worm-eaten conditon which is a consequence of navigation in these seas, and apart from the rottenness attendant upon age. It will appear perhaps an observation somewhat over-curious, but this would have every characterstic of Spanish oak, if Spanish oak were distended by any unnatural means.

In reading the above sentence, a curious apothegm of an old weather-beaten Dutch navigator comes full upon my recollection. "It is as sure," he was wont to say, when any doubt was entered of his veracity, "as sure as there is a sea where the ship itself will grow in bulk like the living body of the seaman."

About an hour ago, I made bold to thrust myself among a group of the crew. They paid no manner of attention, and, although I stood in the very midst of them all, seemed utterly unconscious of my presence. Like the one I had at first seen in the hold, they all bore about them the marks of a hoary old age. Their knees trembled with infirmity; their shoulders were bent double with decrepitude; their shrivelled skins rattled in the wind; their voices were low, tremulous, and broken; their eyes glistened with the rheum of years; and their gray hairs streamed terribly in the tempest. Around them, on every part of the deck, lay scattered mathematical instruments of the most quaint and obsolete construction.

I mentioned, some time ago, the bending of a studding-sail. From that period, the ship, being thrown dead off the wind, has continued her terrific course due south, with every rag of canvas packed upon her, from her truck to her lower studding-sail booms, and rolling every moment her top-gallant yard-arms into the most appaling hell of water which it can enter into the mind of man to imagine. I had just left the deck, where I find it impossible to maintain a footing, although the crew seem to experience little inconvenience. It appears to me a miracle of miracles that our enormous bulk is not swallowed up at once and forever. We are surely doomed to hover continually upon the brink of eternity, without taking a final plunge into the abyss. From billows a thousand times more stupendous than any I have ever seen, we glide away with the facility of the arrowy seagull; and the colossal waters rear their heads above us like demons of the deep, but like demons confined to simple threats, and forbidden to destroy. I am led to attribute these frequent escapes to the only natural cause which can amount for such effect. I must suppose the ship to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous undertow.

I have seen the captain face to face, and in his own cabin—but, as I expected, he paid me no attention. Although in his appearance there is, to a casual observer, nothing which might bespeak him more or less than man, still a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with the sensation of wonder with which I regarded him. In stature, he is nearly my own height; that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well-knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkable otherwise. But it is the singularity of the expression which reigns upon the face—it is the intense, the wonderful, the thrilling evidence of old age so utter, so extreme, which excites within my spirit a sense—a senti-

ment ineffable. His forehead, although little wrinkled, seems to bear upon it the stamp of a myriad of years. His gray hairs are records of the past, and his grayer eyes are sybils of the future. The cabin floor was thickly strewn with strange, iron-clasped folios and mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete, long-forgotten charts. His head was bowed down upon his hands, and he pored, with a fiery, unquiet eye, over a paper which I took to be a commission, and which, at all events, bore the signature of a monarch. He murmured to himself—as did the first seaman whom I saw in the hold—some low peevish syllables of a foreign tongue; and although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile.

The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld. The crew glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries; their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning; and when their fingers fall athwart my path in the wild glare of the battle-lanterns, I feel as I have never felt before, although I have been all my life a dealer in antiquities, and have imbibed the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.

When I look around me, I feel ashamed of my former apprehension. If I trembled at the blast which has hitherto attended us, shall I not stand aghast at a warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which, the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective? All in the immediate vicinity of the ship, is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe.

As I imagined, the ship proves to be in a current—if that appellation can properly be given to a tide which, howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract.

To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible; yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onward to some exciting knowledge—some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose at-

tainment is destruction. Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself. It must be confessed that a supposition apparently so wild has every probability in its favor.

The crew pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step; but there is upon their countenance and expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair.

In the meantime the wind is still in our poop, and, as we carry a crowd of canvas, the ship is at times lifted bodily from out the sea! Oh, horror upon horror!—the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny! The circles rapidly grow small—we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool—and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship is quivering—oh God! and—going down!

DEAD LEGS

(continued from page 23)

Dall sat in that wheelchair, his eyes staring blankly out of his dead, distorted face. His hands still held tightly a heavy, ax-like surgical implement, and his legs had been cut off by terrific strokes above the knees. In the red pool around the chair lay the severed bonds that had held his legs, but the legs themselves were not near the chair nor anywhere in the operating-room. The men gazed at one another dumbly.

Then someone pointed dumbly, and all saw that red footprints led from the chair into the room they had first rushed through, the office. They followed the footprints back in there and from them came exclamations of an utter and deeper horror as they saw. On the oblong of whiter cement at the corner of the room's floor lay the two severed legs.

"Roper was buried under the floor there, he said," someone exclaimed in a choking voice. "And he said Roper's legs—"

But another cried what was in all their minds. "Roper's legs or not, Dall did it back there in the other room. He never moved afterward . . .

"How did the legs get here?"

HE

by H. P. Lovecraft

While H. P. LOVECRAFT filled many of his stories with projections and elaborations of his personal fears, antipathies, fragments of dreams, etc., few of them can be considered genuinely autobiographical. This is one of the few, for the opening is based upon his own feelings about his stay in New York City, as well as reflecting his life-long love affair with the eighteenth century.

I SAW HIM ON A sleepless night when I was walking desperately to save my soul and my vision. My coming to New York had been a mistake; for whereas I had looked for poignant wonder and inspiration in the teeming labyrinths of ancient streets that twist endlessly from forgotten courts and squares and waterfronts to courts and squares and waterfronts equally forgotten, and in the Cyclopean modern towers and pinnacles that rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons, I had found instead only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to master, paralyze, and annihilate me.

The disillusion had been gradual. Coming for the first time upon the town, I had seen it in the sunset from a bridge, majestic above its waters, its incredible peaks and pyramids rising flowerlike and delicate from pools of violet mist to play with the flaming golden clouds and the first stars of evening. Then it had lighted up window by window above the shimmering tides where lanterns nodded and glided and deep horns bayed weird harmonies, and had itself become a starry firmament of dream, redolent of faery music, and one with the marvels of Carcassonne and Samarcand and El Dorado and all glorious and half-fabulous cities.

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Shortly afterward I was taken through those antique ways so dear to my fancy—narrow, curving alleys and passages where rows of red Georgian brick blinked with small-paned dormers above pillared doorways that had looked on gilded sedans and paneled coaches—and in the first flush of realization of these long-wished things I thought I had indeed achieved such treasures as would make me in time a poet.

But success and happiness were not to be. Garish daylight showed only squalor and alienage and the noxious elephantiasis of climbing, spreading stone where the moon had hinted of loveliness and elder magic; and the throngs of people that seethed through the flumelike streets were squat, swarthy strangers with hardened faces and narrow eyes, shrewd strangers without kinship to the scenes about them, who could never mean aught to a blue-eyed man of the old folk, with the love of fair lanes and white New England village steeples in his heart.

So instead of the poems I had hoped for, there came only a shuddering blankness and ineffable loneliness; and I saw at last a fearful truth which no one had ever dared to breathe before—the unwhisperable secret of secrets—the fact that this city of stone and stridor is not a sentient perpetuation of old New York as London is of Old London and Paris is of old Paris, but that it is in fact quite dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things which have nothing to do with it as it was in life. Upon making this discovery I ceased to sleep comfortably; though something of resigned tranquillity came back as I gradually formed the habit of keeping off the streets by day and venturing abroad only at night, when darkness calls forth what little of the past still hovers wraithlike about, and old white doorways remember the stalwart forms that once passed through them. With this mode of relief I even wrote a few poems, and still refrained from going home to my people lest I seem to crawl back ignobly in defeat.

Then, on a sleepless night's walk, I met the man. It was in a grotesque hidden courtyard of the Greenwich section, for there in my ignorance I had settled, having heard of the place as the natural home of poets and artists. The archaic lanes and houses and unexpected bits of square and court had indeed delighted me, and when I found the poets and artists to be loud-voiced pretenders whose quaintness is tinsel and whose lives are a denial of all that pure beauty which is poetry and art, I stayed on for love of these venerable things. I fancied them as they were in their prime, when Greenwich was a placid village not yet engulfed by the town; and in the hours before dawn, when all the revellers had slunk away, I used to wander alone among their cryptical windings and brood upon the

curious arcana which generations must have deposited there. This kept my soul alive, and gave me a few of those dreams and visions for which the poet far within me cried out.

The man came upon me at about 2 one cloudy August morning, as I was threading a series of detached courtyards; now accessible only through the unlighted hallways of intervening buildings, but once forming parts of a continuous network of picturesque alleys. I had heard of them by vague rumor, and realized that they could not be upon any map of today; but the fact that they were forgotten only endeared them to me, so that I had sought them with twice my usual eagerness. Now that I had found them, my eagerness was again redoubled; for something in their arrangement dimly hinted that they might be only a few of many such, with dark, dumb counterparts wedged obscurely betwixt high blank walls and deserted rear tenements, or lurking lamplessly behind archways, unbetrayed by hordes of the foreign-speaking or guarded by furtive and uncommunicative artists whose practises do not invite publicity or the light of day.

He spoke to me without invitation, noting my mood and glances as I studied certain knockered doorways above iron-railed steps, the pallid glow of traceried transoms feebly lighting my face. His own face was in shadow, and he wore a wide-brimmed hat which somehow blended perfectly with the out-of-date cloak he affected; but I was subtly disquieted even before he addressed me. His form was very slight, thin almost to cadaverousness; and his voice proved phenomenally soft and hollow, though not particularly deep. He had, he said, noticed me several times at my wanderings; and inferred that I resembled him in loving the vestiges of former years. Would I not like the guidance of one long practised in these explorations, and possessed of local information profoundly deeper than any which an obvious newcomer could possibly have gained?

As he spoke, I caught a glimpse of his face in the yellow beam from a solitary attic window. It was a noble, even a handsome, elderly countenance; and bore the marks of a lineage and refinement unusual for the age and place. Yet some quality about it disturbed me almost as much as its features pleased me—perhaps it was too white, or too expressionless, or too much out of keeping with the locality, to make me feel easy or comfortable. Nevertheless I followed him; for in those dreary days my quest for antique beauty and mystery was all that I had to keep my soul alive, and I reckoned it a rare favor of Fate to fall in with one whose kindred seekings seemed to have penetrated so much farther than mine.

Something in the night constrained the cloaked man to silence, and for a long hour he led me forward without needless words; making only the briefest of comments concerning ancient names and dates and changes, and directing my progress very largely by gestures as we squeezed through interstices, tiptoed through corridors, clambered over brick walls, and once crawled on hands and knees through a low, arched passage of stone whose immense length and tortuous twistings effaced at last every hint of geographical location I had managed to preserve. The things we saw were very old and marvelous, or at least they seemed so in the few straggling rays of light by which I viewed them, and I shall never forget the tottering Ionic columns and fluted pilasters and urn-headed iron fence-posts and flaring-linteled windows and decorative fanlights that appeared to grow quainter and stranger the deeper we advanced into this inexhaustible maze of unknown antiquity.

We met no person, and as time passed the lighted windows became fewer and fewer. The street-lights we first encountered had been of oil, and of the ancient lozenge pattern. Later I noticed some with candles; and at last, after traversing a horrible unlighted court where my guide had to lead me with his gloved hand through total blackness to a narrow wooden gate in a high wall, we came upon a fragment of alley lit only by lanterns in front of every seventh house—unbelievably Colonial tin lanterns with conical tops and holes punched in the sides. This alley led steeply uphill—more steeply than I had thought possible in this part of New York—and the upper end was blocked squarely by the ivy-clad wall of a private estate, beyond which I could see a pale cupola, and the tops of trees waving against a vague lightness in the sky. In this wall was a small, low-arched gate of nail-studded black-oak, which the man proceeded to unlock with a ponderous key. Leading me within, he steered a course in utter blackness over what seemed to be a gravel path, and finally up a flight of stone steps to the door of the house, which he unlocked and opened for me.

We entered, and as we did so I grew faint from a reek of infinite mustiness which welled out to meet us, and which must have been the fruit of unwholesome centuries of decay. My host appeared not to notice as he piloted me up a curving stairway, across a hall, and into a room whose door I heard him lock behind us. Then I saw him pull the curtains of the three small-paned windows that barely showed themselves against the lightening sky; after which he crossed to the mantel, struck

flint and steel, lighted two candles of a candelabrum of twelve sconces, and made a gesture enjoining soft-toned speech.

In this feeble radiance I saw that we were in a spacious, well-furnished and paneled library dating from the first quarter of the Eighteenth Century, with splendid doorway pediments, a delightful Doric cornice, and a magnificiently carved overmantel with scroll-and-urn top. Above the crowded bookshelves at intervals along the walls were well-wrought family portraits; all tarnished to an enigmatical likeness to the man who now motioned me to a chair beside the graceful Chippendale table. Before seating himself across the table from me, my host paused for a moment as if in embarrassment; then, tardily removing his gloves, wide-brimmed hat, and cloak, stood theatrically revealed in full mid-Georgian costume from queued hair and neck ruffles to knee-breeches, silk hose, and the buckled shoes I had not previously noticed. Now slowly sinking into a lyre-back chair, he commenced to eye me intently.

Without his hat he took on an aspect of extreme age which was scarcely visible before, and I wondered if this unperceived mark of singular longevity were not one of the sources of my original disquiet. When he spoke at length, his soft, hollow, and carefully muffled voice not infrequently quavered; and now and then I had great difficulty in following him as I listened with a thrill of amazement and half-disavowed alarm which grew each instant.

"You behold, Sir," my host began, "a man of very eccentrical habits, for whose costume no apology need be offered to one with your wit and inclinations. Reflecting upon better times, I have not scrupled to ascertain their ways and adopt their dress and manners; an indulgence which offends none if practised without ostentation. It hath been my good fortune to retain the rural seat of my ancestors, swallowed though it was by two towns, first Greenwich, which built up hither after 1800, then New York, which joined on near 1830. There were many reasons for the close keeping of this place in my family, and I have not been remiss in discharging such obligations. The squire who succeeded to it in 1768 studied sartain arts and made sartain discoveries, all connected with influences residing in this particular plot of ground, and eminently desarving of the strongest guarding. Some curious effects of these arts and discoveries I now purpose to show you, under the strictest secrecy; and I believe I may rely on my judgment of men enough to have no distrust of either your interest or your fidelity."

He paused, but I could only nod my head. I have said that I was alarmed, yet to my soul nothing was more deadly than the material

daylight world of New York, and whether this man were a harmless eccentric or a wielder of dangerous arts I had no choice save to follow him and slake my sense of wonder on whatever he might have to offer. So I listened.

"To—my ancestor," he softly continued, "there appeared to reside some very remarkable qualities in the will of mankind; qualities having a little-suspected dominance not only over the acts of one's self and of others, but over every variety of force and substance in Nature, and over many elements and dimensions deemed more univarsal than Nature itself. May I say that he flouted the sanctity of things as great as space and time and that he put to strange uses the rites of sartain half-breed red Indians once encamped upon this hill? These Indians showed choler when the place was built, and were plaguely pestilent in asking to visit the grounds at the full of the moon. For years they stole over the wall each month when they could, and by stealth performed sartain acts. Then, in '68, the new squire catched them at their doings, and stood still at what he saw. Thereafter he bargained with them and exchanged the free access of his grounds for the exact inwardness of what they did; larning that their grandfathers got part of their custom from red ancestors and part from an old Dutchman in the time of the States-General. And pox on him, I'm afeared the squire must have sarved them monstrous bad rum—for a week after he larnt the secret he was the only man living that knew it. You, Sir, are the first outsider to be told there is a secret, and split me if I'd have risked tampering that much with—the powers—had ye not been so hot after bygone things."

I shuddered as the man grew colloquial—and with the familiar speech of another day. He went on.

"But you must know, Sir, that what—the squire—got from those mongrel salvages was but a small part of the larning he came to have. He had not been at Oxford for nothing, nor talked to no account with an ancient chymist and astrologer in Paris. He was, in fine, made sensible that all the world is but the smoke of our intellects; past the bidding of the vulgar, but by the wise to be puffed out and drawn in like any cloud of prime Virginia tobacco. What we want, we may make about us; and what we don't want, we may sweep away. I won't say that all this is wholly true in body, but 'tis sufficient true to furnish a very pretty spectacle now and then. You, I conceive, would be tickled by a better sight of sartain other years than your fancy affords you; so be pleased to hold back any fright at what I design to show. Come to the window and be quiet."

My host now took my hand to draw me to one of the two windows on the long side of the malodorous room, and at the first touch of his ungloved fingers I turned cold. His flesh, though dry and firm, was of the quality of ice; and I almost shrank away from his pulling. But again I thought of the emptiness and horror of reality, and boldy prepared to follow whithersoever I might be led. Once at the window, the man drew apart the yellow silk curtains and directed my stare into the blackness outside. For a moment I saw nothing save a myriad of tiny dancing lights, far, far before me. Then, as if in response to an insidious motion of my host's hand, a flash of heat-lightning played over the scene, and I looked out upon a sea of luxuriant foliage—foliage unpolluted, and not the sea of roofs to be expected by any normal mind. On my right the Hudson glittered wickedly, and in the distance ahead I saw the unhealthy shimmer of a vast salt marsh constellated with nervous fireflies. The flash died, and an evil smile illumined the waxy face of the aged necromancer.

"That was before my time—before the new squire's time. Pray let us try again."

I was faint, even fainter than the hateful modernity of that accursed city had made me.

"Good God!" I whispered; "can you do that for *any time?*" And as he nodded, and bared the black stumps of what had once been yellow fangs, I clutched at the curtains to prevent myself from falling. But he steadied me with that terrible, ice-cold claw, and once more made his insidious gesture.

Again the lightning flashed—but this time upon a scene not wholly strange. It was Greenwich, the Greenwich that used to be, with here and there a roof or row of houses as we see it now, yet with lovely green lanes and fields and bits of grassy common. The marsh still glittered beyond, but in the farther distance I saw the steeples of what was then all of New York; Trinity and St. Paul's and the Brick Church dominating their sisters, and a faint haze of wood smoke hovering over the whole. I breathed hard, but no so much from the sight itself as from the possibilities my imagination terrifiedly conjured up.

"Can you—dare you—go *far?*" I spoke with awe, and I think he shared it for a second, but the evil grip returned.

"*Far?* What I have seen would blast ye to a mad statue of stone! Back, back—forward, *forward*—look, ye puling lack-wit!"

And as he snarled the phrase under his breath he gestured anew; bringing to the sky a flash more blinding than either which had come

before. For full three seconds I could glimpse that pandemoniac sight, and in those seconds I saw a vista which will ever afterward torment me in dreams. I saw the heavens verminous with strange flying things, and beneath them a hellish black city of giant stone terraces with impious pyramids flung savagely to the moon, and devil-lights burning from unnumbered windows. And swarming loathsomely on aerial galleries I saw the yellow, squint-eyed people of that city, robed horribly in orange and red, and dancing insanely to the pounding of fevered kettle-drums, the clatter of obscene crotala, and the maniacal moaning of muted horns whose ceaseless dirges rose and fell undulantly like the waves of an unhallowed ocean of bitumen.

I saw this vista, I say, and heard as with the mind's ear the blasphemous domdaniel of cacophony shrieking fulfillment of all the horror which that corpse-city had ever stirred in my soul, and forgetting every injunction to silence I screamed and screamed and screamed as my nerves gave way and the walls quivered about me.

Then, as the flash subsided, I saw that my host was trembling too; a look of shocking fear half-blotting from his face the serpent distortion of rage which my screams had excited. He tottered, clutched at the curtains as I had done before, and wriggled his head wildy, like a hunted animal. God knows he had cause, for as the echoes of my screaming died away there came another sound so hellishly suggestive that only numbed emotion kept me sane and conscious. It was the steady, stealthy creaking of the stairs beyond the locked door, as with the ascent of a barefoot or skin-shod horde; and at last the cautious, purposeful rattling of the brass latch that glowed in the feeble candlelight. The old man clawed and spat at me through the moldy air, and barked things in his throat as he swayed with the yellow curtain he clutched.

"The full moon—damn ye—ye . ye yelping dog—ye called 'em, and they've come for me! Moccasined feet—dead men—Gad sink ye, ye red devils, but I poisoned no rum o' yours—han't I kept your pox-rotted magic safe?—ye swilled yourselves sick, curse ye, and ye must needs blame the squire—let go, you! Unhand that latch—I've naught for ye here. "

At this point three slow and very deliberate raps shook the panels of the door, and a white foam gathered at the mouth of the frantic magician. His fright, turning to steely despair, left room for a resurgence of his rage against me; and he staggered a step toward the table on whose edge I was steadying myself. The curtains, still clutched in his right hand as his left clawed out at me, grew taut and finally crashed

down from their lofty fastenings; admitting to the room a flood of that full moonlight which the brightening of the sky had presaged. In those greenish beams the candles paled, and a new semblance of decay spread over the must-reeking room with its wormy paneling, sagging floor, battered mantel, rickety furniture, and ragged draperies. It spread over the old man, too, whether from the same source or because of his fear and vehemence, and I saw him shrivel and blacken as he lurched near and strove to rend me with vulturnine talons. Only his eyes stayed whole, and they glared with a propulsive, dilated incandescence which grew as the face around them charred and dwindled.

The rapping was now repeated with greater insistence, and this time bore a hint of metal. The black thing facing me had become only a head with eyes, impotently trying to wriggle across the sinking floor in my direction, and occasionally emitting feeble little spits of immortal malice. Now swift and splintering blows assailed the sickly panels, and I saw the gleam of a tomahawk, as it cleft the rending wood. I did not move, for I could not; but watched dazedly as the door fell in pieces to admit a colossal, shapeless influx of inky substance starred with shining, malevolent eyes. It poured thickly, like a flood of oil bursting a rotten bulkhead, overturned a chair as it spread, and finally flowed under the table and across the room to where the blackened head with the eyes still glared at me. Around that head it closed totally swallowing it up, and in another moment it had begun to recede; bearing away its invisible burden without touching me, and flowing again out of that black doorway and down the unseen stairs, which creaked as before, though in reverse order.

Then the floor gave way at last, and I slid gaspingly down into the nighted chamber below, choking with cobwebs and half-swooning with terror. The green moon, shining through broken windows, showed me the hall door half open; and as I rose from the plaster-strown floor and twisted myself free from the sagged ceiling, I saw sweep past it an awful torrent of blackness, with scores of baleful eyes glowing in it. It was seeking the door to the cellar, and when it found it, it vanished therein. I now felt the floor of this lower room giving as that of the upper chamber had done, and once a crashing above had been followed by the fall past the west window of something which must have been the cupola. Now liberated for the instant from the wreckage, I rushed through the hall to the front door; and finding myself unable to open it, seized a chair and broke a window, climbing frenziedly out upon the unkempt lawn where moonlight danced over yard-high grass and weeds. The wall

was high, and all the gates were locked; but moving a pile of boxes in a corner I managed to gain the top and cling to the great stone urn set there.

About me in my exhaustion I could see only strange walls and windows and old gambrel roofs. The steep street of my approach was nowhere visible, and the little I did see succumbed rapidly to a mist that rolled in from the river despite the glaring moonlight. Suddenly the urn to which I clung began to tremble, as if sharing my own lethal dizziness; and in another instant my body was plunging downward to I knew not what fate.

The man who found me said that I must have crawled a long way despite my broken homes, for a trail of blood stretched off as far as he dared look. The gathering rain soon effaced this link with the scene of my ordeal, and reports could state no more than that I had appeared from a place unknown, at the entrance of a little black court off Perry Street.

I never sought to return to those tenebrous labyrinths, nor would I direct any sane man thither if I could. Of who or what that ancient creature was, I have no idea; but I repeat that the city is dead and full of unsuspected horrors. Whither *he* has gone, I do not know; but I have gone home to the pure New England lanes up which fragrant sea-winds sweep at evening.

THE BEAST OF AVEROIGNE

by Clark Ashton Smith

CLARK ASHTON SMITH wrote eleven stories centering around his projections of mediaeval Averoigne, ten of which were published in *WEIRD TALES* between 1930 and 1941. While there are a few cross-currents among them, these are not important enough so that one particular story really should be presented before another. All are popular with CAS fans, but the present one seemed especially apt for a terror magazine, while others are more along the bizarre line--though all can be called weird.

OLD AGE, LIKE A MOTH in some fading arras, will gnaw my memories oversoon, as it gnaws the memories of all men. Therefore I, Luc le Chaudronnier, sometime known as astrologer and sorceror, write this account of the true origin and slaying of the Beast of Averoigne. And when I have ended, the writing shall be sealed in a brazen box, and the box be set in a secret chamber of my house at Ximes, so that no man shall learn the verity of this matter till many years and dec-

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illustration by
Jayem Wilcox

ades have gone by. Indeed, it were not well for such evil prodigies to be divulged while any who took part in them are still on the earthward side of Purgatory. And at present the truth is known only to me and to certain others who are sworn to maintain secrecy.

As all men know, the advent of the Beast was coeval with the coming of that red comet which rose behind the Dragon in the early summer of 1369. Like Satan's rutilant hair, trailing on the wind of Gehenna as he hastens worldward, the comet streamed nightly above Averoigne, bringing the fear of bale and pestilence in its train. And soon the rumor of a

strange evil, a foulness unheard of in any legend, passed among the people.

To Brother Gerome of the Benedictine Abbey of Perigon it was given to behold this evil ere the horror thereof became manifest to others. Returning late to the monastery from an errand in Ste. Zenobie, Gerome was overtaken by darkness. No moon arose to lantern his way through the forest; but between the gnarled boughs of antic oaks, he saw the vengefully streaming fire of the comet, which seemed to pursue him as he went. And Gerome felt an eerie fear of the pitdeep shadows, and he made haste toward the abbey postern.

Passing among the ancient trees that towered thickly behind Perigon, he thought that he discerned a light from the windows, and was much cheered thereby. But, going on, he saw that the light was near at hand, beneath a lowering bough. It moved as with the flitting of a fen-fire, and was of changeable color, being pale as a corposant, or ruddy as new-spilled blood, or green as the poisonous distillation that surrounds the moon.

Then, with terror ineffable, Gerome beheld the thing to which the light clung like a hellish nimbus, moving as it moved, and revealing dimly the black abomination of head and limbs that were not those of any creature wrought by God. The horror stood erect, rising to more than the height of a tall man; and it swayed like a great serpent, and its members undulated, bending like heated wax. The flat black head was thrust forward on a snakish neck. The eyes, small and lidless, glowing like coals from a wizard's brazier, were set low and near together in a noseless face above the serrate gleaming of such teeth as might belong to a giant bat.

This much, and no more, Gerome saw, ere the thing went past him with its nimbus flaring from venomous green to a wrathful red. Of its actual shape, and the number of its limbs, he could form no just notion. Running and slithering rapidly, it disappeared among the antique oaks, and he saw the hellish light no more.

Nigh dead with fear, Gerome reached the abbey postern and sought admittance. And the porter, hearing the tale of that which he had met in the moonless wood, forbore to chide him for his tardiness.

Before nones, on the morrow, a dead stag was found in the forest behind Perigon. It had been slain in some ungodly fashion, not by wolf or poacher or hunter. It was unmarked by any wound, other than a wide gash that had laid open the spine from neck to tail. The spine itself had been shattered and the white marrow sucked therefrom; but no other

portion had been devoured. None could surmise the nature of the beast that slew and ravened in such fashion. But the good Brothers, heedful of the story told by Gerome, believed that some creature from the Pit was abroad in Averoigne. And Gerome marvelled at the mercy of God, which had permitted him to escape the doom of the stag.

Now, night by night, the comet greatened, burning like an evil mist of blood and fire, while the stars blenched before it. And day by day, from peasants, priests, woodcutters and others who came to the abbey, the Benedictines heard tales of fearsome and mysterious depredations. Dead wolves were found with their chines laid open and the white marrow gone; and an ox and a horse were treated in like fashion. Then, it seemed, the known beast grew bolder — or else it wearied of such humble prey as the creatures of farm and forest.

At first, it did not strike at living men, but assailed the dead like some foul eater of carrion. Two freshly buried corpses were found lying in the cemetery at Ste. Zenobie, where the thing had dug them from their graves and had bared their vertebrae. In each case, only a little of the marrow had been eaten; but, as if in rage or disappointment, the cadavers had been torn asunder, and the tatters of their flesh were mixed with the rags of their cerements. From this, it would seem that only the spinal marrow of creatures killed was pleasing to the monster.

Thereafterward, the dead were not again molested. But on the night following the desecration of the graves, two charcoal-burners, who plied their trade in the forest not far from Perigon were slain in their hut. Other charcoal-burners, dwelling near by, heard the shrill screams that fell to sudden silence; and peering fearfully through the chinks of their bolted doors, they saw anon in the starlight the departure of a black, obscenely glowing shape that issued from the hut. Not till dawn did they dare to verify the fate of their fellows, who had been served in the same manner as the stag, the wolves and the corpses.

Theophile, the abbot of Perigon was much exercised over this evil that had chosen to manifest itself in the neighborhood and whose depredations were all committed within a few hours' journey of the abbey. Pale from overstrict austerities and vigils, he called the monks before him in assembly; and a martial ardor against the minions of Asmodai blazed in his hollowed eyes as he spoke.

"Truly," he said, "there is a great devil among us, that has risen with the comet from Malebolge. We, the Brothers of Perigon, must go forth with cross and holy water to hunt the devil in its hidden lair, which lies haply at our very portals."

So, on the forenoon of that same day, Theophile, together with Gerome and six others chosen for their hardihood, sallied forth and made search of the forest for miles around. They entered with lit torches and lifted crosses the deep caves to which they came, but found no fiercer thing than wolf or badger. Also, they searched the crumbling vaults of the deserted castle of Faussestlammes, which was said to be haunted by vampires. But nowhere could they trace the monster or find any sign of its lairing.

With nightly deeds of terror, beneath the comet's blasting, the middle summer went by. Men, women, children, to the number of more than forty, were done to death by the Beast, which, though seeming to haunt mainly the environs of the abbey, ranged afield at times even to the shores of the river Isoile and the gates of La Frenaie and Ximes. There were those who beheld it by night, a black and slithering foulness clad in changeable luminescence; but no man saw it by day. And always the thing was silent, uttering no sound; and was swifter in its motion than the weaving viper.

Once, it was seen by moonlight in the abbey garden, as it glided toward the forest between rows of peas and turnips. Then, coming in darkness, it struck within the walls. Without waking the others, on whom it must have cast a Lethean spell, it took Brother Gerome, slumbering on his pallet at the end of the row, in the dormitory. And the fell deed was not discovered till daybreak, when the monk who slept nearest to Gerome awakened and saw his body, which lay face downward with the back of the robe and the flesh beneath in bloody tatters.

A week later, it came and dealt likewise with Brother Augustin. And in spite of exorcisms and the sprinkling of holy water at all doors and windows, it was seen afterward, gliding along the monastery halls; and it left an unspeakably blasphemous sign of its presence in the chapel. Many believed that it menaced the abbot himself; for Brother Constantin the cellarer, returning late from a visit to Vyones, saw it by starlight as it climbed the outer wall toward that window of Theophile's cell which faced the great forest. And seeing Constantin, the thing dropped to the ground like a huge ape and vanished among the trees.

Great was the scandal of these happenings, and the consternation of the monks. Sorely, it was said, the matter preyed on the abbot, who kept his cell in unremitting prayer and vigil. Pale and meager as a dying saint he grew, mortifying the flesh till he tottered with weakness; and a feverish illness devoured him visibly.

More and more, apart from this haunting of the monastery, the horror

fared afield, even invading walled towns. Toward the middle of August, when the comet was beginning to decline a little, there occurred the grievous death of Sister Therese, the young and beloved niece of Theophile, killed by the hellish Beast in her cell at the Benedictine convent of Ximes. On this occasion the monster was met by late passers in the streets, and others watched it climb the city ramparts, running like some enormous beetle or spider on the sheer stone as it fled from Ximes to regain its hidden lair.

In her dead hands, it was told, the pious Therese held tightly clasped a letter from Theophile in which he had spoken at some length of the dire happenings at the monastery, and had confessed his grief and despair at being unable to cope with the Satanic horror.

ALL THIS, IN THE COURSE OF the summer,. came to me in my house at Ximes. From the beginning, because of my commerce with occult things and the powers of darkness, the unknown Beast was the subject of my concern. I knew that it was no creature of Earth or of the terrene hells; but regarding its actual character and genesis I could learn no more at first than any other. Vainly I consulted the stars and made use of geomancy and necromancy; and the familiars whom I interrogated professed themselves ignorant, saying that the Beast was altogether alien and beyond the ken of sublunar spirits.

Then I bethought me of that strange, oracular ring which I had inherited from my fathers, who were also wizards. The ring had come down from ancient Hyperborea, and had once been the property of the sorcerer Eibon. It was made of a redder gold than any that Earth had yielded in latter cycles, and was set with a large purple gem, somber and smoldering, whose like is no longer to be found. In the gem an antique demon was held captive, a spirit from pre-human worlds, which would answer the interrogation of sorcerers.

So, from a rarely opened casket, I brought out the ring and made such preparations as were needful for the questioning. And when the purple stone was held inverted above a small brazier filled with hotly burning amber, the demon made answer, speaking in a shrill voice that was like the singing of fire. It told me the origin of the Beast, which had come from the red comet, and belonged to a race of stellar devils that had not visited Earth since the foundering of Atlantis; and it told me the attributes of the Beast, which, in its own proper form, was invisible and intangible to men, and could manifest itself only in a fashion supremely abominable. Moreover, it informed me of the one method by

which the Beast could be vanquished, if overtaken in a tangible shape. Even to me, the student of darkness, these revelations were a source of horror and surprise. And for many reasons, I deemed the mode of exorcism a doubtful and perilous thing. But the demon had sworn that there was no other way.

Musing on that which I had learned, I waited among my books and alembics; for the stars had warned me that my intervention would be required in good time.

To me, following the death of Sister Therese, there came privily the marshal of Ximes, together with the abbot Theophile, in whose worn features and bowed form I descried the ravages of mortal sorrow and horror and humiliation. And the two, albeit with palpable hesitancy, asked my advice and assistance in the laying of the Beast.

"You, Messire le Chaudronnier," said the marshal, "are reputed to know the arcanic arts of sorcery, and the spells which summon and dismiss demons. Therefore, in dealing with this devil, it may be that you shall succeed where all others have failed. Not willingly do we employ you in the matter, since it is not seemly for the church and the law to ally themselves with wizardry. But the need is desperate, lest the demon should take other victims. In return for your aid we can promise you a goodly reward of gold and a guarantee of lifelong immunity from all inquisition which your doings might otherwise invite. The Bishop of Ximes, and the Archbishop of Vyones, are privy to this offer, which must be kept secret."

"I ask no reward," I replied, "if it be in my power to rid Averoigne of this scourge. But you have set me a difficult task, and one that is haply attended by strange perils.

"All assistance that can be given you shall be yours to command," said the marshal. "Men-at-arms shall attend you, if need be."

Then Theophile, speaking in a low, broken voice, assured me that all doors, including those of the abbey of Perigon, would be opened at my request, and that everything possible would be done to further the laying of the fiend.

I reflected briefly, and said: "Go now, but send to me, an hour before sunset, two men-at-arms, mounted, and with a third steed. And let the men be chosen for their valor and discretion: for this very night I shall visit Perigon, where the horror seems to center.

Remembering the advice of the gem-imprisoned demon, I made no preparation for the journey, except to place upon my index finger the ring of Eibon, and to arm myself with a small hammer, which I placed

at my girdle in lieu of a sword. Then I awaited the set hour, when the men and the horses came to my house, as had been stipulated.

The men were stout and tested warriors, clad in chain-mail, and carrying swords and halberds. I mounted the third horse, a black and spirited mare, and we rode forth from Ximes toward Perigon, taking a direct and little-used way which ran through the werewolf-haunted forest.

My companions were taciturn, speaking only in answer to some question and then briefly. This pleased me; for I knew they would maintain a discreet silence regarding that which might occur before dawn. Swiftly we rode, while the sun sank in a redness as of welling blood among the tall trees; and soon the darkness wove its thickening webs from bough to bough, closing upon us like some inexorable net of evil. Deeper we went, into the brooding woods; and even I, the master of sorceries, trembled a little at the knowledge of all that was abroad in the darkness.

Undelayed and unmolested, however, we came to the abbey at late moonrise, when all the monks, except the aged porter, had retired to their dormitory. The abbot, returning at sunset from Ximes, had given word to the porter of our coming, and he would have admitted us; but this, as it happened, was no part of my plan. Saying I had reason to believe the Beast would re-enter the abbey that very night, I told the porter my intention of waiting outside the walls to intercept it, and merely asked him to accompany us in a tour of the building's exterior, so that he could point out the various rooms. This he did, and during the tour, he indicated a certain window in the second story as being that of Theophile's cell. The window faced the forest, and I remarked the abbot's rashness in leaving it open. This, the porter told me, was his invariable custom, in spite of the oft-repeated demoniac invasions of the monastery. Behind the window we saw the glimmering of a taper, as if the abbot were keeping late vigil.

We had committed our horses to the porter's care. After he had conducted us around the building and had left us, we returned to the space before Theophile's window and began our long watch.

Pale and hollow as the face of a corpse, the moon rose higher, swimming above the somber oaks, and pouring a spectral silver on the gray stone of the abbey walls. In the west the comet flamed among the lusterless signs, veiling the lifted sting of the Scorpion as it sank.

We waited hour by hour in the shortening shadow of a tall oak, where none could see us from the windows. When the moon had passed over, sloping westward, the shadow began to lengthen toward the wall. All was mortally still, and we saw no movement, apart from the slow shifting of

the light and shade. Halfway between, midnight and dawn the taper went out in Theophile's cell, as if it had burned to the socket; and thereafter the room remained dark.

Unquestioning, with ready weapons, the men-at-arms companioned me in that vigil. Well they knew the demonian terror which they might face before dawn; but there was no trepidation in their bearing. And knowing much that they could not know, I drew the ring of Eibon from my finger, and made ready for that which the demon had directed me to do.

The men stood nearer than I to the forest, facing it perpetually according to a strict order that I had given. But nothing stirred in the fretted gloom; and the slow night ebbed; and the skies grew paler, as if with morning twilight. Then, an hour before sunrise, when the shadow of the great oak had reached the wall and was climbing toward Theophile's window, there came the thing I had anticipated. Very slowly it came, and without forewarning of its nearness, a horror of hellish red light, swift as a kindling, wind-blown flame, that leapt from the forest gloom and sprang upon us where we stood stiff and weary from our night-long vigil.

One of the men-at-arms was borne to the ground, and I saw above him, in a floating redness as of ghostly blood, the black and semi-serpentine form of the Beast. A flat and snakish head, without ears or nose, was tearing at the man's armor with sharp, serrate teeth, and I heard the teeth clash and grate on the linked iron. Swiftly I laid the ring of Eibon on a stone I had placed in readiness, and broke the dark jewel with a blow of the hammer that I carried.

From the pieces of the lightly shattered gem, the disemprisoned demon rose in the form of a smoky fire, small as a candle-flame at first, and greatening like the conflagration of piled fagots. And, hissing softly with the voice of fire, and brightening to a wrathful, terrible gold, the demon leapt forward to do battle with the Beast, even as it had promised me, in return for its freedom after cycles of captivity.

It closed upon the Beast with a vengeful flaring, tall as the flame of an auto-da-fe, and the Beast relinquished the man-at-arms on the ground beneath it, and writhed back like a burnt serpent. The body and members of the Beast were loathfully convulsed, and they seemed to melt in the manner of wax and to change dimly and horribly beneath the flame, undergoing an incredible metamorphosis. Moment by moment, like a werewolf that returns from its beasthood, the thing took on the wavering similitude of man. The unclean blackness flowed and swirled, assuming

the weft of cloth amid its changes, and becoming the folds of a dark robe and cowl such as are worn by the Benedictines. Then, from the cowl, a face began to peer, and the face, though shadowy and distorted, was that of the abbot Theophile.

This prodigy I beheld for an instant; and the men also beheld it. But still the fire-shaped demon assailed the abhorrently transfigured thing, and the face melted again into waxy blackness, and a great column of sooty smoke arose, followed by an odor as of burning flesh commingled with some mighty foulness. And out of the volumed smoke, above the hissing of the demon, there came a single cry in the voice of Theophile. But the smoke thickened, hiding both the assailant and that which it assailed; and there was no sound, other than the singing of red fire.

At last, the sable fumes began to lift, ascending and disappearing amid the boughs, and a dancing golden light in the shape of a will-o-the-wisp, went soaring over the dark trees toward the stars. And I knew that the demon of the ring had fulfilled its promise, and had now gone back to those remote and ultramundane deeps from which the sorcerer Eibon had drawn it down in Hyperborea to become the captive of the purple gem.

The stench of burning passed from the air, together with the mighty foulness; and of that which had been the Beast there was no longer any trace. So I knew that the horror born of the red comet had been driven away by the fiery demon. The fallen man-at-arms had risen, unharmed beneath his mail, and he and his fellow stood beside me, saying anught. But I knew that they had seen the changes of the Beast, and had divined something of the truth. So, while the moon grew gray with the nearness of dawn, I made them swear an awful oath of secrecy, and enjoined them to bear witness to the statement I must make before the monks of Perigon.

Then, having settled this matter, so that the good renown of the holy Theophile should suffer no calumny, we aroused the porter. We averred that the Beast had come upon us unaware, and had gained the abbot's cell before we could prevent it, and had come forth again, carrying Theophile with its snakish members as if to bear him away to the sunken comet. I had exorcised the unclean devil, which had vanished in a cloud of sulfurous fire and vapor; and most unluckily, the abbot had been consumed by the fire. His death, I said, was a true martyrdom, and would not be in vain: the Beast would no longer plague the country or bedevil Perigon, since the exorcism I had used was infallible.

This tale was accepted without question by the Brothers, who grieved mightily for their good abbot. Indeed, the tale was true enough, for

Theophile had been innocent, and was wholly ignorant of the foul change that came upon him nightly in his cell, and the deeds that were done by the Beast through his loathfully transfigured body. Each night the thing had come down from the passing comet to assuage its hellish hunger; and being otherwise impalpable and powerless, it had used the abbot for its energumen, molding his flesh in the image of some obscene monster from beyond the stars.

It had slain a peasant girl in Ste. Zenobie on that night while we waited behind the abbey. But thereafter the Beast was seen no more in Averoigne; and its murderous deeds were not repeated.

IN TIME THE COMET passed to other heavens, fading slowly; and the black terror it had wrought became a varying legend, even as all other bygone things. The abbot Theophile was canonized for his strange martyrdom; and they who read this record in future ages will believe it not, saying that no demon or malign spirit could have prevailed thus upon true holiness. Indeed, it were well that none should believe the story: for thin is the veil betwixt man and the godless deep. The skies are haunted by that which it were madness to know; and strange abominations pass evermore between Earth and moon and athwart the galaxies. Unnamable things have come to us in alien horror and will come again. And the evil of the stars is not as the evil of Earth.

decoration by Boyce

THE WHISPERING THING

by Eddy C. Bertin

EDDY C. BERTIN lives in Belgium, and wrote this story in Dutch orginally, later translating it into English for submission here. it did not seem to us to read at all like a translation except in one or two places, very easily correctible, and even here, not necessarily so; we have read innumerable ms. from authors whose native language was English but whose writing sounded more like translations.

I HAVE KNOWN HARVEY DENVER, since we were both four years old. We went together to kindergarten, and thereafter to the same small-village school. We shared the same friends, the same enemies and a dislike for the same teacher. We enjoyed the same games and hobbies, almost as two brothers. To his memory, I will now write the real facts, as much as I know them or want to know them, about that summer day, many years back now, when I ran screaming from the graveyard where Harvey was buried.

Maybe you'll think them part of a boy's nightmare, something which doesn't or can't happen in this nice, safe little world of ours, where there is no place for the unknown, the impossible. I know otherwise, and I don't care if you believe me or not. There is no proof, not any more. The only proof is in my brain, where it has been haunting me ever since, always returning in nightmares, in a fear for dark places. But maybe

this is the way to whip it all out of my mind, where every detail is engraved, our walks together, the ruins and the whispering

It started the summer when we both became nine years. We were born the same year, Harvey in April and I in June, which made him the natural leader for our two-man expeditions, the more as he was bigger and stronger than myself. After schooltime, we enjoyed taking long walks to go and play in the forest, which was about a kilometer from our village. The wood was nothing exceptional, a bunch of trees and bushes, thrown together by playful nature, but to us it was paradise. Usually, we didn't go deep into the wood; we had felt once (on our behinds) the troubles which arose when we had stayed out too late. Also, the forest became soon much thicker and darker, and we still feared to get lost someday.

We didn't believe any longer in witches and gnomes, but we still feared the dark, even if we would never confess it. Still, on a free afternoon, with time to spare, we penetrated much deeper than usual. It was then that we found the house, or what was still left of it. That wasn't much—just the entrance to a cellar, a mass of stones and part of one crumbling side-wall, miraculously still standing, like a sentinel. It must have been a very small house, mostly built of timber, that later on had been used for other purposes. Only the cellar seemed to be intact. Curious, we went and looked into the black hole, waiting each for the other to go in first, It would have to be Harvey, of course. But he didn't seem very anxious to enter. He descended two steps, bent and looked once again.

"Can't see a thing," he whispered.

"Of course not, how could you?" I answered, whispering too.

"There isn't a single window, anywhere. Must be dark as hell, down there."

I don't know why we whispered. Maybe it was the loneliness of the ruins of the house, the dampness which welled up out of the dark cave in gulps of foul air. I shivered, although it wasn't cold at all, but somehow the warmth couldn't quite reach me.

"Could there be anyone there?" Harvey asked. His voice, soft as he spoke, seemed to bounce back against the spiderwebbed cellar walls and return to us in a hollow whispering, like some lost voice, drifting of on far-away winds.

"Are you crazy?" I hushed him. "Who could live in a hole like this? There's nothing there. Come on, let's go and play somewhere else."

Our voices answered out of the dark entrance. The lonely, crumbling

wall, bitten through by time, the damp steps, leading down into the abyss of shadows, almost seemed to radiate a feeling of there's no right word for it. Something old, unholy, something evil—evil especially to us, intruders in its domain.

"Come on, Harvey," I whispered. "I don't like this at all.

Let's get out of here."

He didn't hear me. His head bent, he was listening very sharply. Suddenly he looked up at me. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"I didn't hear anything," I answered. I tried to laugh, but it sounded so strange and out of place, that I stopped immediately. The only thing I heard, was the echo of my own voice.

"I thought . I thought I heard a respiration," he whispered.

My ears had received no sound, and I didn't like it at all. Whatever could breathe in a dark cave like this? But then, it couldn't; he must have heard wrong. There was nothing down there. There couldn't be.

I took Harvey's arm. "Come on, let's get away."

"No, wait." He shook himself free and listened intently, holding his breath, spying the darkness with his ears, almost eager to capture a sound.

"It sounds . like a dog panting

"A dog?" I said. "Why should a dog be down there? Could be anything, even a wild animal."

"Maybe he fell," Harvey said. "Maybe he slipped on the stairs and broke a leg. Maybe his owner got tired of him and just chained him in there to let him die of starvation. Some people would just do a thing like that."

He had stopped whispering. "You wouldn't let a dog die down there, all alone in the darkness, hurt and wanting company, would you?"

I didn't answer.

"Listen," he said, "it's almost like moaning. Now I'm sure, there's something down there, something alive and hurt. I'm going to see what it is."

Suddenly, I was deadly afraid to be left alone. I grasped Harvey. "No, please, don't go down. It is bad, I feel it."

"Now don't start acting like a sissie," he snapped. "The poor thing's probably just hungry. You stay here if you're scared."

Slowly, taking care not to slip on the stone steps, covered with lichens and dirt, he descended. It smelled dusty and damp. Small beasts hurried away over the steps. Of course, I couldn't stay behind now, which would

have proved me a coward. So I followed him, the fear throbbing in my throat.

Down there, the absolute darkness, filled the first seconds with colored lights and stripes and circles, dancing on my irises. Then, after a while, I started to perceive the dark forms of old furniture, the walls of the cave, and something dark, in a corner of the cellar, something slowly moving. It seemed almost to flow, an indefiniable black form, lying flat on the floor.

"There is the poor beast," Harvey said. With a courage I would never have believed him able of—or maybe it now seems recklessness —he stretched his hand to touch it.

And then the thing whispered. Not a moan or a groan, not a recognizable sound, but a thick, slithery whisper, which seemed to go on and on between the slippery walls. The whisper of something old and feeble, something slimy and swollen, which seemed dead and yet alive, as if it had just awakened from a long sleep. Something petrified and timeless, suddenly coming to itself.

I turned and ran, my only thoughts for free air and light. I slipped on the stairs and hurt my knee, but then I was out of the darkness and away from the horrible whispering.

Outside I got my breath and courage back, but not enough of the last to go back inside. I cursed my cowardice, but I didn't return. I just sat down and waited, then got up and started to walk around the ruins. Twice I called, but got no response of any kind. Not a sound came from the cellar. Harvey was alone down there, with the whispering thing. I waited. There was nothing else to do. Then, after a quarter of an hour, Harvey came out of the infernal darkness. He was pale, and so I knew that he, too, had been scared, even if he was laughing now.

"Coward," he teased, "whatever did you run away from? There's nothing horrible down there, just a poor sick old dog, feeling lonesome."

I didn't say anything. I knew Harvey had lied to me. Whatever had whispered down there in the slimy blackness, hadn't been a dog or any other animal I knew.

We went home and got our second spanking for coming late for supper. The next days and weeks, I saw less and less of Harvey; he almost seemed to evade me. Whenever he spoke to me, he was short and unfriendly, not at all his usual self. Sometimes, on free days, I saw him leave the village, as soon as he could get away, to go to the cellar in the forest. Twice I accompanied him, but I didn't follow him down

into the darkness, although he asked me to. He told me the dog was better now, and wanted to play with me also. It was a very old and friendly dog, Harvey said, he was so long and thin. Harvey nicknamed him "Stake" for that. Sometimes he told Harvey stories, and that's how I cornered Harvey.

Outside a circus, I had never heard a dog speak, and everyone knew in a circus it was just a trick. So Harvey had to admit, it wasn't a dog that whispered to him. Stake was a man, he said at last, a friend. He was old, very old. More than two hundred years, he had told Harvey, and he had come a long way. He had been very sick, and he had been so long in the dark, that the sun hurt his eyes, He never came out, not even at night. So if I wanted to meet Stake, I should go to him.

One day, I almost did. I followed Harvey down the slithery stone steps like carvings, leading downward into a hungry stomach of waiting shadows. My back felt hot and cold at the same time, and I was deadly afraid. Nevertheless, I followed. Then I was down, and groping my way, trying to see a thing. Then it whispered. A soft, throaty whisper, slithery and unspeakable evil. "Don," it whispered my name, in almost unrecognable words, almost as if it spoke with a tongue, not meant to utter human words.

I cried out, I couldn't hold it back. I panicked, stumbling out of the nauseating cave in a mad flight, and then I ran, away from the forest and the cave with its hellish horror. I never went near it again.

Harvey stopped playing with me altogether from that day on. In fact, he evaded all the other boys and girls of the village, too, and always went out out to play alone. Once I overheard a conversation between our parents, and I heard them say that Harvey was always outside much too late. They said one night he even leaped through the window, thinking them asleep, and went out to the forest. Then they started suspecting things about Harvey and girls, which I didn't understand completely, but his father finished the argument, saying that Harvey was still much too young for that. It was just the boy's wild nature, he thought.

But after a while, people began to notice how pale and sick he looked. I had seen it already for a long time, and I knew it to be the influence of the thick, stale air in the cellar, and the fact that he was always down there in the dark and never played any more in the sunlight. But I didn't tell on him, and maybe that's my big guilt.

Then he fell sick. The doctor said he had never seen a boy of his age looking so pale. His whole face was thin, almost fallen-in flesh around his skullbones. You could see his cheekbones sticking out. He had lost

much weight too. The doctor couldn't exactly say, what was the matter with him, and that was strange too. Harvey had never been sick before, except the usual children's diseases. The doctor ordered much fresh air, wholesome food and some vitamin-pills, and if that didn't help, his parents should go and see a specialist in the city. And Harvey had always been so strong and healthy looking!

The second week of his sickness, I'll never forget, It was the next time, I came unwillingly in contact with Harvey's "friend" Stake.

It was a cloudy, moonless night. The weather was fine, warm and windless, but not too hot. I had left the window of my room open. I wasn't asleep yet, which was luck for me. Otherwise I'd never have heard it, before it was too late.

It came from the woods, towards the village. Maybe it was bored. Maybe it wanted some comapny, or just wanted to find Harvey. Those were my thoughts then; now I know the much more important reason it had to come out of its cellar.

I heard the slow, dragging steps on the path, and then the crunching of the gravel. Don't ask me how; I just knew, with an unsettling clearness, what it was that walked stealthily towards our house through the protecting darkness outside, hidden even from the moonlight. In one movement, I was out of bed and pulling the window shut. The very next second, something whispered very softly outside. There was a rubbing sound against the window, as if some soft body pressed against the cold wall, trying to get in, always whispering. There was nothing to be seen in the darkness outside.

Then the moon came through the clouds for a few fleeting moments, an eye of ice looking downwards that gave me the first glimpse ever of the unknown, which is always at our side. Because the whispering went on, something clawed against the glass, making sharp lines in it as for some eternal seeming seconds moonlight flooded the scene outside, and there was nothing there.

Real fear runs through your veins like ice; it crawls upwards under your skin to your neck. It feels like suddenly standing on the brink of an abominable deep pit with crawling emptiness. Something was there and yet wasn't. I don't know how I managed to move, but somehow I shrank backwards, never leaving the window out of my eyes. I couldn't breathe; unseen claws seemed to grope in my stomach and lungs. I'll never know which reflex or instinct made me reach for the chair. I was very young then, and I had never had any experience with the unseen. I had reached a breaking point in those few seconds. I cried out and

threw the chair towards the thing beyond the window. The glass splintered, as I ran to the door. It wasn't necessary; it moved outside, very quick, away from the house.

I got a spanking for having broken the window, and then they had to call the doctor to give me a sedative. Nobody paid attention to the glass splinters, which all lay inside the room. I had seen how the glass cracked and broke, just before the chair reached it!

Then Harvey died.

Very suddenly, in the midst of night. The doctor said his heart unexpectedly gave up, for no special reason at all. He had grown very weak and thin, almost just skin over his bones. He simply passed away, from this world into another. I hope it was into a better one.

Two days later, he was buried. Everyone I knew from the neighborhood was there, serious-looking people everywhere. There was a lot of crying going on. I don't know if I cried. When you're nine years old, there's no real understanding of the "death", I only felt Harvey was far, far away from me now, and he would never come back. Yes, maybe I did cry.

The next day, a free afternoon, I went alone to the churchyard to look at Harvey's tombstone and all the pretty flowers on it. Then I heard it again. Now it wasn't sneaking, covered by the dark of night and a moonless sky. It came as an angry thunderstorm, angry, mad, towards Harvey's grave. I jumped away, ran a few steps and let myself roll behind a large tombstone, where I stayed hidden, shivering with uncontrollable fear, while the raving terror came nearer and nearer, until it was so close I could hear it, the loathsome, angry whispering.

Much, much later, I came home, to break down in my mother's arms, raving and crying, trying to escape from every shadow in the room. They didn't believe anything I said, until my father, to calm me, went to the graveyard and saw what somebody or something had done to the fresh grave and the stone, to the dug-up, broken coffin and to what was now still left of Harvey's little body. I was delirious for two days, before I could speak coherently of the cellar in the wood, and Harvey's friend who lived in there. They didn't believe it at first, but they went nevertheless, to find out what was true of my story. They went with many, armed with shovels, pick-axes, guns and electric lamps. They came back, late in the night, looking very tired and somehow scared. None of them said anything. The next day, my father told me I must have dreamed everything. They had only found a dead dog in the cave.

Only now, many years later, my father too has passed away, and

before me I have his diary on that day. In his fine and yet strong handwriting, at last I know what they really found down there.

It was something which could have been human once, but I can't be sure. Neither can any one of us. It was a skeleton, smaller than a normal man, and crouching, as if it wasn't meant to walk upright. But on those yellow bones, new flesh, new muscles and fresh, soft skin were growing. Weak ones, nevertheless, the muscles and flesh of a young boy. They could hardly keep the heavy thing moving. It tried to strike us, and it whispered to us, as Don had told us. When Franz and then Wilfried hit it with their shovels, it whimpered. We crushed it with our spades, split the bones of the unspeakable thing, and all the time it kept on whispering to us and trying to fight us.

It couldn't get past us out of the cellar, and we kept it in the white burning circles of our torches. God forgive me, if it was something which had the right to live, but I don't think it had. The life which moved it was stolen, as was the flesh which grew on it. A foul stench of decay came in gulps out of it, when we broke the bones and split the soft skin. There was blood too, thick and spreading a stench of something very old and very dead. Harold cut off an arm with a blow of his shovel, and the arm and the hand kept on moving, crawling over the floor. Then Franz heard something outside. He and Peter went to look, and they swear there was nothing to be seen, yet suddenly trees were pushed aside and something struck them away from the entrance with a formidable strength.

We all heard something come down the stairs, and at that exact moment I split the skull of the moaning horror with my pick-axe. There was a loud shriek, suddenly cut off and then there was nothing beside us in the cellar. The whispering had stopped, and the loathsome parts of flesh, bones and muscles lay silent.

I can't think of that moment, without shuddering. What could the thing have done to us, if by pure luck, I hadn't hit the skull at the exact moment before the invisible projection (I can't think of a better suited word for it) reached us? We burned all which was on the floor of the cave, and then we made the cellar collapse over the ashes so that now there is nothing there but a heap of crumbling stones.

They never knew what it had been exactly. Neither did they try to find out too hard. But I can't forget what is burned in my memory by such a petrifying fear as I had never known, and hope will never know again. It is that day, when I lay alone behind the shadow of a tomb, shivering madly in the full sunlight, while something unseen crushed Harvey's tombstone and broke open his grave, always whispering, whispering .

The Star Chamber

The title for this department offers an interesting example of how the meanings of words change with time, and how institutions often tend to become something like a polar opposite to the intentions of their beginnings.

In his book, *The Reformation* (chapter v.), Will Durant tells us that Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarchs, " established the Court of the Star Chamber to try, in secret sessions, obstreperous nobles too powerful to fear local judges or juries; and year by year he brought the ruined aristocracy and the frightened prelacy into subordination to the monrachy." So we see that, although from the first the Star Chamber could be said to have been an institution of terror, the purpose of this terror at the outset was to serve the common good, promote justice, and check and punish overarrogant power in the hands of local nobles. While my sympathies in that period remain with Richard III, whom I consider to have been most foully betrayed, slain, and then smeared by one of the earliest and slickest of secular propaganda machines (Shakespeare's sources for his play were written by men following the Tudor party line, including Sir Thomas More, who was born too late to have had any first-hand experiences of Richard's reign), had I been living then, and not been one of the powerful lords being brought to heel, I might have considered King Henry as a progressive monarch, even while I deplored some of the losses of liberty and the subordination of Parliament to the throne.

Henry's grand-daughter, Elizabeth I, had her Privy Council act as " the Court of Star Chamber to try political offenders, suspended without appeal the rights of habeus corpus and jury trial." (Durant, *The Age of Reason Begins*, chapter I) And this became even more of an instrument of terror: the definition of "treason" had become very loose, and such cases could be summoned

(Turn to Page 122)

THE DEAD-ALIVE

by Nat Schachner & Arthur L. Zagat

NATHAN SCHACHNER and ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT were first hailed as a most promising new team of authors by Hugo Gernsback when he published their short novel, *The Tower of Evil,* in the Summer 1930 issue of *WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY.* This was a good story, but it was their second tale, *In 20,000 A.D. (WONDER STORIES,* September 1930) which made a hit with the readers. The present story is their sole appearance in a weird magazine, and it is really science fiction of the "weird-scientific" type; you will notice that, although the story was published in 1931, it is dated 1935, and we thought it would be interesting to retain their footnote about the electric eye, which was very little known to the general public at the time. Staunch science-fictionists as they were, Schachner and Zagat would not make their villain nothing more than a carbon copy of the stereotyped "mad scientist", so popular in those days, even if his motivation for kidnapping is conventional enough. Carruthers may surprise you a little in the end, as he did me when I first read the story back then.

ON A BRILLIANT, SUNSHINY DAY in May of 1935, the unspeakable, unnamable crime had been committed! Carelessly, gayly the world moved in its accustomed grooves; men performed their routine tasks restlessly, haunted by visions of deep crystal pools overshadowed by rustling birches, the graceful arching leap of a speckled trout, the singing whine of line over reel; young lovers walked with a certain elate

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springiness, the wine of life flooding their veins. Not yet did mankind realize the import, the vileness of that deed.

On a like brilliant, sunshiny day in June of 1935, sat at his desk Hartley—to his friends, Buck—Saunders, erstwhile idol of football enthusiasts, All-American back—Princeton, 1934; now bond salesman for the conservative investment house of Clarke, Lambert & Co. But there was no spring or summer in his soul; he stared through the open window at the panorama of river traffic with blank, unseeing eyes.

Only yesterday—ages ago it seemed—he had buried his father, his gentle, understanding father, stricken suddenly. Heart failure, the doctors said. He had seen the lifeless form to its final abode—a cemetery in the Westchester hills.

By sheer force of will, he came down to the office this day. The staff had been properly sympathetic; but once he was at his desk, neatly labeled in brass with his formal name, the mass of papers awaiting him seemed devoid of meaning, of any content. So he shoved them aside, and stared listlessly into nothingness.

The telephone jangled. He ignored it. It rang louder, more insistently. Annoyed, Buck removed the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"Mr. Saunders?" It was the switchboard operator.

"Yes, what is it?" he asked impatiently.

"I have a call for you. Just a moment."

There was a little delay in making the connection. He was sorely tempted to hang up. Then he heard a brusk masculine voice. "Mr. Hartly Saunders?" it queried.

"Well, what of it?" Damn these fools. Why couldn't they leave him alone!

"Police Headquarters speaking. Your father, John Saunders, was buried yesterday at Mountville Cemetery?"

A stab of pain shot through him at the matter-of-fact statement. "Yes. Why do you ask?"

"This is Detective Sergeant Riley. We have some important information we'd like to check up with you. Come down here to see me at once."

"But what is it all about—can't you tell me now?"

"Sorry, but that's impossible. I can't explain over the phone. Will expect you in half an hour. Good-bye."

Buck started to remonstrate, when he discovered that the line was dead.

Gone now was his apathy. His mind was keen and alert as ever. What did Police Headquarters know of his father's death and burial, and why this peremptory summons? A hundred hypotheses formed and faded in his whirling thoughts, and all were rejected at fantastic. There was only one thing to do; follow directions and see this Riley. Mechanically he put on his hat, muttered unintelligIbe explanation to his chief, and fled out of the door.

A taxi hurried over at his uplifted finger, the door slammed behind him, and he was speeding downtown.

The ride seemed interminable, but it was only twenty minutes before he was deposited in front of the formidable-looking building. He gave his name and errand to the stout policeman lolling at the front desk. Evidently he was expected, for almost immediately he was ushered into the presence of Detective Sergeant Riley.

The big, strong jawed Irishman, iron-gray at the temples, leaned back in his chair and surveyed him thoughtfully a while. Buck grew restless under the protracted scrutiny and was about to demand an explanation, when the detective commenced abruptly.

"You're Hartley Saunders. Your father was buried in Mountville yesterday." He seemed to be ticking off invisible points.

Buck flinched, but nodded assent.

"This morning," Riley continued, "his grave was found open, the lid

of the casket pried off, and his body removed. It has vanished without leaving a trace."

Buck jumped to his feet with an exclamation. "What! my father's body gone? But where—what happened—" he gasped for words.

Not unkindly the big detective motioned him back to his seat. "That is just what we are trying to find out," he explained. "We have nothing to go on as yet. Let me give you the facts. Early this morning we received a call for assistance from the local police. I was assigned to the job. I wasn't exactly tickled about going—but I went. Orders are orders.

"When I reached the cemetery, I found a county detective in charge. It was no ordinary case of body-snatching, you must understand. The freshly made grave had been opened, the dirt was scattered all over the other graves, not in mounds, as you'd expect if dug up by a spade, but as if"—he hesitated for a moment—"as if it had come up in handfuls and been strewn about. The casket cover was violently wrenched open; yet we could find no marks on the wood, as would surely appear if crowbars or any *mechanical* implements were used to pry it up."

Buck Saunders was listening with growing horror, yet he remarked the emphasis the detective placed on the word "mechanical"

Riley continued his story. "The body was removed—clean vanished. There was a watchman on the grounds. They found him early this morning, walking about aimlessly, making queer, unintelligible noises. The police questioned him, but it was no use. The man was mad, stark gibbering mad. Only a few words could be understood in his moanings. Something about corpses that walked—ghosts. He died this noon, still raving!"

The big detective paused, and looked at his visitor strangely. Buck sat stricken, unable to speak.

With elaborate casualness the policeman threw his bombshell. "And I forgot to tell you—there were no spade-marks down the sides of the grave, *but we did find the marks of fingers dug deep into the earthen walls.*"

Incredulously, Buck grasped the full horror of this simple statement. "Do you mean that men dug up my father's body, using only their fingers as tools?"

Gravely the detective nodded his head. "Impossible as it sounds, that seems the only logical conclusion from all the evidence. Yet if the grave-robbers were only men, why did the watchman go mad? There were no marks of violence on him—he had not been attacked. And what was that cryptic reference to dead men who walk? No—something happened last

night—that watchman saw something so unbelievably horrible that it twisted his brain into madness. What it is we don't know yet, but we're going to find out," he concluded grimly.

Buck's face had grown hard and stern during the recital of this weird tale. "And I—I am going to run down these grave-robbers, these ghouls, whatever they prove themselves to be—men or fiends out of Hell!"

Riley nodded in understanding. "There is another thing, Mr. Saunders. We have been keeping it under cover—the newspapers know nothing about it yet, but this is not the only case. Within the past two weeks, there have been reports of similar outrages in a dozen cemeteries widely scattered over southern and eastern New York. In every instance the clues were the same—no spade or lever was used, and in each case clutching fingers had dug deep into the soil."

Buck arose; the very marrow in his bones seemed frozen; the iron had entered his soul. He extended his hand. "Thank you very much for telling me all this. I've no doubt you will do your utmost to run down these fiends. But I shall not rest from this day on, until the guilty are brought to justice."

The brawny officer took his hand. "Never fear, we'll get them. But you, my lad, careful is the word. Don't try anything rash. You're up against something uncanny—horrible. Look out it doesn't get you."

"Don't worry; I can take care of myself," responded Buck grimly. Looking at his six feet of brawn and muscle, hardened on many a football field, the steely blue eyes and the firm line of his jaw, Riley was forced to confess that this confident young man would prove a formidable antagonist for any one.

BACK TO THE OFFICE Buck rode. His plans were formulated. A tangled excuse and he readily obtained leave of absence, his superior shaking his head sadly at the retreating figure. Once home he equipped himself with flashlight and automatic, and took an evening train to Mountville. As night fell dark and mysterious over the cemetery, white marble glimmering ghostly, he took his station, determined to watch the whole night through.

Morning found him still watching, soaked with the gray mists of early dawn, cramped with crouching, reeling from fatigue—but the vigil was fruitless. Mysterious sounds and noises there had been a-plenty, but the marauders had not returned.

Night after night Buck kept his lonely vigil, but in vain. Whatever it was that had ravaged the grave, it had no evident intention of returning.

Chilled and racked with the weariness of tense, sleepless watches, soul steeped in bitter anguish, Saunders was forced to admit defeat. Reluctantly he returned to the city. Perhaps, he thought, the police had been able to discover something in his absence. Eagerly he phoned Riley.

"No, my lad, boomed the hearty Irish voice, "we're as far from a solution as when we started. Farther; for reports of body-snatchings are coming in now thick and fast, from all over the state. Hundreds of them. All the same way. Must be a large group working. We've found out this though: *in every single instance the stolen corpse had been freshly buried!* No decayed bodies are taken. We've sent out secret instructions to have guards detailed to each cemetery immediately after a funeral. Didn't see anything, did you? No? Mighty lucky for you, I'm thinking. Don't try it again—there's something very horrible about it all. It'll break into the newspapers any day now—can't keep it away from them much longer. Good-bye."

And sure enough, next morning horror flaunted and screamed in huge headlines across the front page.

The fashionable Kenesco Cemetery was the milieu of a frightful crime. Two funeral processions had converged on that famous burial-ground the day before—one, that of a internationally famous financier; the other, of a beautiful society girl, the season's debutante, carried off untimely in the first blush of youth and happiness. Everything had gone according to schedule. The great concourse of friends and mourning relatives, the banked masses of floral tributes, the intoning of solemn rituals, the careful lowering of expensive bronze caskets, the tamping down of the all-embracing earth, the orderly dispersal of those who had gathered in anguish or curiosity. The earthly drama was over.

Alas, not yet! As evening cast its lengthening shadows over the wilderness of marble, two heavily armed state troopers, picked men, proven in many a desperate encounter, took their station in the shelter in a huge mausoleum on a knoll overlooking the graves. Their instructions were direct and succint: "If any man, or beast, or thing, approaches the graves, shoot, and shoot to kill."

At two in the morning, a belated commuter hurrying home along a road past the great cemetery heard a shot crash through the blackness of the night. As he paused, affrighted, three others followed in quick succession. Silence. Then the sound of terrific struggle, and a piercing scream split the air. As it rose, it choked and strangled into a gurgling rattle. The commuter's blood froze in his veins; his feet were rooted to the spot. Then came another sound—an unearthly moaning, wailing,

that rose and fell in a gamut of mortal agony. Like the unutterable cries of a lost soul in deadly torment, he described it afterward.

He paused not in his going. Deadly fear gave wings to his speed, nor did he slacken till he threw himself into bed, fully clothed, there to cower and tremble under blankets the balance of the night.

That morning, the sergeant of the troop, making his rounds, came upon a frightful scene. The two fresh graves were yawning wide, the bodies had disappeared! Nearby, on the ground, lay the crumpled figure of a trooper. Eyes protruding half out of their sockets, mouth twisted in a final desperate scream, there was that upon his face that caused the sergeant, hardened veteran of the World War, to shudder and avert his gaze. That face, those eyes, had witnessed unutterable, unspeakable horrors. Near him lay his heavy service revolver, three shells exploded. About his neck were the deep red grooves of clawing fingers.

The other trooper was gone. An hour later he was found miles away, running and stumbling across a woodland patch, gun still clutched in hand, one cartridge fired—mad, stark mad. No human sound came from his tortured throat, only rasping, frightful screams. He died at noon in a straitjacket, still screaming.

Impressions had been taken of every metallic object on the strangled trooper's uniform for possible finger prints, the account read. The experts were working on them now.

Buck read along with renewed horror. His youthful pleasant face set in hard lines of determination. That afternoon he saw Riley at headquarters. The detective greeted him cordially. To him Buck stated his determination, and begged to be allowed to assist.

Riley looked at him quizzically; then his gaze sobered. "Boy, you don't know what you want tl let yourself in for," he said gravely. "I've handled many crimes in my day, but this is something different. There are forces at work here that I'm afraid even to think of. It's going to be dangerous—damned dangerous."

"Are you afraid?" Buck shot at him.

The big man stiffened. "No one yet has dared say to Tim Riley's face that he's afraid, and don't you be the first one," he warned.

"No offense, Sergeant, but I'm not afraid either. I think I can help on this—and I want to work with you. I can handle a gun pretty well, too. What do you say?"

Thoughtfully the policeman surveyed the eager figure before him, the stamped determination of it, the snapped set of the jaws. Then: "It's a little irregular, but I'll chance it. You're welcome to help."

Silently the two men shook hands.

"Now," commenced Riley, as they resumed their seats, "now that you're my unofficial assistant, I'll tell you of something that's absolutely unbelievable—so unbelievable that I don't credit it myself. Listen to this. You must have read in the newspapers that impressions were taken for fingerprints on the dbwe bod

Buck nodded.

"Well," the detective seemed to be choosing his words, "our fingerprint expert reports that he found a well-defined thumbprint on the button of the trooper's blouse."

Excitedly Buck leaned forward. At last something definite, something tangible to work on.

"He also reported," continued Riley slowly, "that he checked it on our records, and he found its mate. It is the thumb print of Tony the Mug, gangster, thug, murderer. We have his complete record on file."

An exclamation of joy burst from Buck. The mystery was solved. Find Tony the Mug, break up his gang, and the nightmares would cease. But there was no answering look of elation in the Irishman's eye. Instead, a strange pall of nameless horror seemed to settle on him.

Unheeding, Buck asked, "You've sent out orders to search for and arrest him, of course?"

"No, I have not," the detective answered slowly.

"But why not?" came the surprized reply. Then, and then only, did he look up and see the strangeness—almost the dread—on Riley's face.

"Because," the policeman had great difficulty in enunciating the words, *"because—Tony the Mug—was electrocuted for murder at Auburn Prison two weeks ago!"*

With incredulous horror Buck jumped to his feet. "But—but," he gasped, his heart pounded madly, "that is impossible—it can not be—my God, it must not be!"

The detective agreed, soberly. "Yet there are the facts."

Buck's brain whirled with horror. Vehemently he sought an outlet, a solution. Yes, yes, he had it! Riley looked at him inquiringly.

"Of course, it's obvious," the words came tumbling. "This Tony was not killed by the current, only shocked into unconsciousness. Then, when his relatives took away the 'dead' body, they were able to resuscitate him. There have been cases like that. And now he is robbing graves. That's it." The seat dried on his forehead at his own easy explanation.

"Yes," agreed Riley, in a curious, flat tone. "I've heard of those cases. But there is no question that Tony is dead. The prison doctor pronounced

him so. His body lay for a day, and since no one claimed it, he was buried in the prison cemetery the following day. Besides"—he leaned forward—*"Tony the Mug's grave was opened two nights later, and his body removed."*

"God," Buck felt weak, "what are we up against?"

"I don't know as yet, but I'll find out soon," was the rejoinder. Riley swung around, and spoke abruptly. "I'm going out tonight to watch a little cemetery I have in mind—Hopeville—it hasn't been disturbed yet. I've an idea an attempt will be made on it tonight. The larger ones have each a company of ten troopers on guard."

Buck arose. "I'll go with you."

Riley eyed him keenly. "Very well, meet me here at nine-thirty sharp. I'll have the police car waiting and we'll drive out."

PROMPTLY AT NINE-THIRTY Buck presented himself at headquarters. Riley was obviously waiting for him.

"All right, lad, let's go. Here, take this." He opened the drawer of his desk, and brought out a regulation police automatic. "Slip this in your pocket—you may need it. And these flashlights, too, one for each of us."

Buck took the proffered weapon and flashlight, and they started for the door. "Hold on a minute, my boy, until I get something else." A sudden thought had occurred to the detective and he turned back. He opened a wardrobe, and took out—a cavalry saber!

He met Saunders' surprized questioning stare somewhat sheepishly. "Just a relic of my cavalry adventures in the World War," he explained. "Had enlisted in that arm of the service for the duration of the war—knew how to handle horses pretty well. They gave me this pretty little toy and some spurs, then shipped me across. There we were bundled into a troop train—*huit chevaux, quarante hommes*—and rode standing up to the front. That sign on the cattle car was the only smell of a horse I had. All through the war I was a bloody doughboy—unhorsed."

Buck laughed. "And you've been on your legs ever since. But why the paraphernalia tonight? We're not attending a lodge meeting."

The big Irishman was good-humored. "All right, my lad, have your little joke. But something tells me—just another hunch—that this old saber may see more service tonight than it did in France. Remember those troopers up at Kenesco fired four shots—and hurt no one. They were dead shots, too."

Out into the anteroom they walked, the detective swinging the heavy weapon like a cane. The idling policemen stared in surprize; then as they moved toward the outer door, Buck distinctly heard the sound of snickering behind him. He stole a glance sideways at his companion and was mightily amused to see a brickred slowly suffusing neck and countenance, but no other sign that he too had heard. Out they clanked into the street, Riley shutting the door behind him with a bang.

Hastily the detective gained the waiting car at the curb, and deposited his ungainly weapon with a sigh of relief. Buck seated himself at his side. Silently the car slipped into gear, and they were off. Up Fifth Avenue, through the Concourse, left turn to the Bronx River Parkway, on to White Plains they sped. There they turned right, branched off on a dirt road, and followed the twisting ribbon through the night toward Hopeville. A full two hours' drive. Not much was spoken by the two men — they were too busy with their own thoughts.

With scream of brakes and skid of tires, the car came to an abrupt halt under the pitchy darkness of a huge oak. "Here we are," whispered Riley. He switched out the lights. The night was black — there was no moon. Buck heard him fumbling; then a light leaped into being, and a glowing circle stabbed the darkness.

They got out somewhat stiffly, the policeman taking the cavalry saber. Over on the left glimmered faintly white headstones. They were at the cemetery. Two circles of light dancing irregularly on the broken ground, the two men cautiously picked their way through the marble wilderness until they reached a slight rise on which was built a granite mausoleum.

"Switch off your light," Riley whispered, snapping his off; "we park here for the night. There's a man buried yesterday in the grave in front of us.

Buck hastened to obey, and blackness unrelieved wrapped them about with an almost physical impact. Saunders glanced at his wrist. The faint luminescence of his radium wrist watch showed eleven-thirty.

"Keep your gun ready at hand, lad, but don't be in any hurry to shoot, no matter what you see or hear. Wait till I give the word, and for God's sake, no noise." He could hear the ex-cavalry-man's sword softly deposited on the ground. They crouched, waiting, they knew not for what.

The minutes dragged by. Now the moon was rising, a huge brass bowl climbing up the eastern horizon. A dull coppery illumination tinged the ground and gravestones uncannily — a weird half-light almost impenetrable to mortal eye. Nervously, Buck glanced at his watch again.

One minute to midnight! His heart was thumping madly; ghosts of the outraged dead clustered and formed threateningly; faint gibberings and rustlings were conjured up by his heated imagination.

A hand gripped his wrist. Buck started violently, a cry of fear smothered in his throat. "Ssh!" came Riley's tense whisper; "do you hear it?"

Buck strained his ears. Sure enough, up from the road came the faint *tramp, tramp* of feet. Nearer and nearer, louder now—the steady ordered thump of feet marching in unison, like soldiers on parade; mechanical though, slow, spaced, lift, eternity of waiting, down on the ground, like a slow-motion picture of the old German goose-step. Buck felt his flesh prickle, and shudders coursed wildly up and down his spine.

Riley was whispering fiercely. "Get your gun ready, they're coming. Down low, so they can't see us. Don't move till I give the word." Saunders heard him pick up the saber. Down they crouched, waiting.

The noise of marching moved toward them like a wave, nearer, nearer, ever nearer. *God!* thought Buck, *are they coming for us?* Panic seized him, human flesh could not bear that *chump-thump*. Just as he was on the verge of screaming, his finger tightened on the trigger in spite of warning, the sound ceased. They had stopped, not thirty feet away.

Buck strained to pierce that weird unearthly light. Dimly to be described were five figures—men, thank God—wavering shadows, hardly visible. They clustered about the freshly made grave.

Then, to Buck's unutterable horror, the shadows stooped suddenly and clawed at the ground. Up into the air flew great handfuls of earth. With incredible speed the digging continued, the air was thick with flying dirt, pebbles fell rattling. Already the ghostly figures were half immersed in the opening grave.

Loudly, fiercely, Riley's voice-shattered the night. "Hands up, you there, don't move an inch. We've got you covered."

Up went Buck's pistol, ready to shoot. Incredibly, there was no response. The silent figures kept on digging, clawing the earth, unmindful of the threat. It was ominous in its implications.

The detective's flashlight pierced the gloom, the wide circle of light played on those forms. Even as the glare enfolded them, the figures straightened, and as one being, slowly turned their heads toward the crouching pair.

"Merciful Mary, Mother of Saints!" burst a hoarse cry from the Irishman. Buck tried to scream, but couldn't.

Ghastly gray were those faces—the corpse-like pallor of those who have passed beyond the bourne. Lank hair that lay damp on pallid

foreheads. Cheeks that were oddly sunken, gray skin that stretched unpleasantly tight over protruding cheekbones; hands that hung loosely, ending in bony claw-fingers that twitched incessantly. An indefinable air of decay and corruption enveloped them. But most horrible of all—their eyes. Great fixed pupils that stared unwinking at the dazzling beams—stared at the pair, through them, and beyond them. The eyes of somnambulists, that betrayed no warm emotion, no human feeling, only the frightful stare of blankness—as though, Buck thought in terror, as though *there were no minds behind them.* He could see no eyelids, only the fixed unwinking eyes.

Even as they watched, paralyzed with fright, the dread figures galvanized into movement. Up went their right legs uniformly, down they came together, and slowly they advanced—on the crouching pair. Buck could hear Riley mumbling some old forgotten prayer. The pace grew faster—they broke into a trot, still the legs rising and falling together.

"Shoot!" screamed Tim Riley; "shoot before these banshees get us!"

Two pistols cracked simultaneously. With not a pause, the nightmares came on. Again and again the guns spoke. The bullets *must* have found their marks, but steadily, uninterruptedly the figures advanced. But felt his reason giving way under the horror.

"I knew it!" yelled the terrified detective; "they're not human, they're banshees! Run for your life." Up he caught his saber, and commenced to run. Saunders did not hesitate—he was right alongside, running as he had never run before.

On they sped, stumbling, tripping, crashing into gravestones, until their breathing came in great whistling sobs, Riley holding on to his great sword with desperate effort.

Buck glanced fearfully behind. The Things were running in unison, but one figure had pulled ahead, not twenty yards behind. "For God's sake, drop that damned sword, and *run.* It's right behind us," he gasped.

Too spent for words, the detective could only shake his head violently. Another hundred yards they ran, and fell. Again Saunders looked over his shoulder. The hideous Thing was only ten yards behind, and running stiffly, mechanically. He drew his gun, whirled and shot. Still it came on, Gasping with sudden fury, Riley turned. "Damn you," he screamed; "man, ghost or banshee, I run no farther. Come on if you want cold steel."

The Gray Thing rushed toward him. The big Irishman sidestepped swiftly, and swung the saber high. Down it descended with frightful force, caught the figure full on the shoulder. Such was the force of the

blow that it sheared through shoulder and arm, and the arm fell thudding to the ground. The creature's momentum carried it on a while, then it wheeled and started back. The moonlight shone brightly on the gaping shoulder. The flesh was pallid gray, *and not a drop of blood oozed from the wound.* Back it ran, unmindful of its arm!

The men stared aghast. With a great yell, Riley whirled his sword and threw it at the advancing figure with all his strength. It caught the Thing full on the face, and knocked it to the ground.

The moment's respite was enough. Like a flash, the two men ran down the slope to the road, on wings of terror. Even as they gained the car, they saw five figures, one without an arm, descending the slope after them.

With trembling fingers Riley turned the switch, clashed into high, and the car was roaring drunkenly down the road—back to humankind and sanity.

FOR A WEEK Buck lay delirious—in the throes of a violent brain fever. When he finally came to, weak but normal in pulse and mind, he found Tim Riley seated at his bedside.

"Well, lad, I sure am glad to see you out of it. You had a rough time, all right."

"And you, old-timer, how do you feel?"

"O. K. now. Was laid up for two days, but snapped out of it. I'm too tough to knuckle under long."

"What's been happening, Tim, while I've been lying here?" inquired Buck weakly.

"Here, you, go back to sleep," responded the detective gruffy. "You're not well yet by a long shot. See you in a couple of days and tell you all the news." With that Riley left abruptly.

True to his promise, the detective called two days later. Buck was up now, feeling as strong as ever, and rearing to go. Only that fool nurse of his insisted on his staying in, and refused steadily to get him any papers.

After the first cordial salutations, they sat down comfortably to talk. Only now did Buck see the drawn, haggard look on the policeman's face.

"Tell me what's been happening," urged Saunders.

"Hell's broken loose," Riley replied slowly. "And when I say Hell, I mean it literally. Those damned banshees"—he crossed himself devoutly—"are no longer haunting graves. They're swarming over the whole

countryside. People are scared to death. When it comes dark, everyone locks himself up tight; no one dares go out. Last Wednesday a child of twelve disappeared near Schoharie; she hasn't been found yet. The next night a woman was found dead on the highway, a little out of West Point. She was strangled. Then it spread down through Jersey and over into Westchester. Men have been frightened out of their wits, meeting one of them suddenly on a dark road. They have been shot at, but bullets don't hurt them. *We* know that." He shuddered. "I don't know where it's going to end, but if they aren't shipped back to Hell soon "The pause was significant.

Buck had been listening in rapt attention. "They nearly did for me, Tim. But just wait until I get back on my legs again. I've got something glimmering in my mind."

The detective arose. "O. K., lad, just you rest up first," he said soothingly. "Then we'll dope something out together. Meanwhile troops are patrolling all the main roads. So long, and take good care of yourself."

Buck watched the burly form disappear through the doorway, then fell back exhausted. He was weaker than he thought.

He was dozing off when the door flew open and a girl darted into the room.

"Buck, darling, what has happened to you?" she cried.

"Ruth—you here!" the sick man sat up in astonishment. "Where on earth did you come from? I thought you were out on the coast with your folks."

"I was," she declared airily, "but I became fed up with the eternal sunshine and the Native Sons, so I decided to come back East—and here I am."

Buck gazed tenderly at his fiancee, Ruth Forsythe. Dark, vivacious, black eyes dancing, features finely modelled, adorably pursed mouth, she was a sight to make any normal male's heart beat a bit faster. There flashed into Saunders' mind the memory of that day, when, asked to choose between himself and Jim Carruthers, brilliant classmate of his at college, both desperately in love with Ruth, she had unhesitatingly turned to him, and kissed him full on the mouth. Nor could he forget the distorted features of Jim, as he saw the girl he loved in his rival's arms. Muttering an imprecation, he had seized his hat, clapped it violently on his head, and departed like a storm out of the house—and out of sight. From that day on, no one had seen him again. That was six months ago. What a pity, too! The man was a brilliant biologist; his professors had envisoned a marvelous career for him.

"Why do you look at me strangely, dearest?" asked Ruth, somewhat startled.

Buck came to himself with a start. "Nothing, darling. Just thinking of old times, and so tickled to see you again."

"But, darling," she seated herself at his side, all anxiety, "what has happened to you? The nurse tells me you staggered in early one morning talking incoherently and took to bed at once with high fever. Tell me all about it."

So Buck, one arm comfortably around the girl, told her all about it, omitting nothing from the desecration of his father's grave to his last desperate adventure.

As he proceeded, Ruth's eyes widened with the horror of it all, and her arms tightened about him. "Oh you poor, poor boy," she crooned, "how glad I am you are alive! No wonder you almost went mad from it." She shuddered at the thought.

"Now you just lie down and rest," she urged; "you're still very weak. "I'll go home, unpack, and be here first thing in the morning to be with you."

"But," Buck objected, "your house is closed—there is no one on the place."

"I have the keys. And I'm not afraid to sleep alone."

"No, you must not go—I'm afraid for you. It's country where you are; there are no houses close by. Those terrible Things are filtering down through Westchester, too."

Laughingly, Ruth answered his protestations. It was all nonsense! The morning paper gave the nearest reported visitation some thirty miles north, so there was nothing to be alarmed about. Besides, it was just for the night, drop some clothes, pick up some others, and come back to town.

So Buck was overborne against his will. He saw her go, and presentiment of evil clamored at his heart. He called after her to return, not to go, but it was too late—she was gone.

Night came. The nurse entered, took his temperature, counted his pulse, did the numerous little things appropriate to a sickroom, and withdrew.

The hall clock struck ten, but Buck could not sleep. Anxiety for Ruth tormented him. Why had he let her go? The hour of midnight chimed, and still he was awake. He was cursing himself for a fool.

Hardly had the last note faded on the air, when the sharp ringing of the telephone took up the refrain. Half sick with apprehension, Saunders

was out of bed in a jiffy, snatched up a dressing-gown, and ran to answer.

With hand that trembled, he picked up the receiver. "Hulloa!"

Ruth's voice came to him, taut, desperate in its urgency.

"Buck, Buck, something's at my window. Faces—terrible faces, they're looking in—they're breaking the glass. Oh my God, Buck, do something! Save me!" Her voice rose to a scream!

Frantically he answered. "Quick, hang up, call police at once. I'll phone too, and come right away."

At the other end he heard a sob of relief. "Buck—at the other window, I see Jim. Jim Carruthers. He's breaking in. He'll save me—save me! I'm going to him. Good-bye."

Buck was almost crazy with anguish. He heard the receiver drop, heard footsteps, heard a call, then a scream of terror, a scream that choked and was still.

In frantic haste he dressed. His heart pounded and hammered; his brain reeled. In one minute he was dashing out of the darkened silent house. In another minute he had run his car out of the garage, swung about on the road to Tilton Heights, where the Forsythes had their home; and throttle wide open, he roared into the night.

The speedometer showed fifty miles, sixty, sixty-five. "Hurry, hurry!" beat his heart. "Faster, faster," raced the blood in his veins. Grimly he held the car to the road, as it careened over the lonely concrete. It was fifteen miles. "Let me get there in time, he prayed.

Jim—what was Jim doing out there? He had disappeared months ago. He had loved Ruth once. Why was he breaking through one window, and the Things through another. Why had Ruth's call turned to a scream?

A blinding illumination lit up everything in Buck's mind. That was it! Jim Carruthers. Jim was responsible for it all! These horrors—they were connected in some way with Jim. He had abducted Ruth. A fury of rage swept over Buck.

With screaming brakes the car slithered to a stop. It was the Forsythe's house. Before the car stopped rolling Saunders was out of it, flashlight in hand, and up the wide stone steps. Furiously he pounded on the door. There was no answer. With all his strength he heaved against it, but it was too sturdy to break down. Abandoning the front, Buck ran around the side of the house, frantic with despair. What he saw brought him to a dead halt—heartsick. Two of the casement windows giving on the livingroom were shattered, shards of broken glass were scattered over

the green lawn, and the turf under the window was trampled as though with many feet.

In a moment he was pulling himself through the jagged pane, unmindful of the sharp edges that lacerated and tore his flesh. The flashlight lit up a scene of destruction; fragments of shattered vases covered the rumpled rugs, the telephone dragged on the floor, the receiver off. In plain language the room told its story of a struggle and abduction. A faint noise seemed to emanate from somewhere—a buzzing that was ominous in the dead silence of that desolation. Instantly Buck was on the alert, gun drawn, and flashing wide arcs over the room. Nothing appeared, but the buzz continued. As the telephone swam into the circle of light, Saunders found the explanation. Central was trying to signal that the receiver was off the hook.

Cautiously, thoroughly, Buck searched through the house. Ruth was gone.

Back to the ground underneath the broken windows went the tortured lover. He picked up the trail of trampled grass, followed it down to the road, where it vanished into the stony macadam. Buck felt the anguish of utter helplessness sweep over him. What could be done now?

Once more he returned to the trampled areas beneath the windows. Methodically, painstakingly, he searched the ground, foot by foot, in the gleam of the flashlight. Fruitless—all in vain. He was giving up—turning away heavy-hearted, when the swing of his hand brought an outer strip into the area of illumination. Ha! what was that?

The excited searcher pounced upon it. A crumpled dirty piece of paper. Carefully, tremblingly he smoothed it. A torn segment of a map—a map of New York State. One of those maps that are given away at filling-stations. Buck grew tense; on it was blue-pencilled a small circle. What did the circle enclose? He strained to read the name of the town. Birdkill, in the Catskills. A small village, evidently. He had never heard of it before.

A fierce exultation surged through his veins. At last—a definite clue. Evidently dropped by one of the ravishers, possibly Carruthers, it bespoke only one thing! There was the hiding-place; the focus of the evil that was invading the land!

AS DUSK WAS FALLING, Buck alighted at the little town of Birdkill, high in the Catskills. Through some quirk of fortune this sleepy little village had escaped the annual throng of vacation-seekers from the great city. Its ten or fifteen frame houses, its Eagle Hotel, its

general store and post-office, preserved the rural atmosphere of a century ago. The whole region about partook of this atmosphere. A few well-tended farms, a concrete road or two, a cheap automobile and a good radio set in every home, these were all of modernity to be found in the vicinage.

Directed by one of the little group engaged in the nocturnal thrill of seeing the train come in, Buck found the village hotel. The accommodations offered were quite satisfactory, though primitive. In its furnishings, the room was immaculately clean. Warned by the clangor of a hand-wielded bell, Buck took a hurried washup in the great china bowl, and descended to "supper."

Having disposed of the heaping platters of plain but wholesome food set before him, Saunders accompanied his few fellow guests to the "piazza," and ensconced himself in one of its wooden rockers. He found himself between the village postmaster and the station agent, bachelors both. Luck favored him. The two best sources of information for miles around were his neighbors.

"First trip to Birdkill?" Postmaster Simpson essayed the first step in the investigation undergone by every newcomer. Buck expected this and had his story ready.

"Why, yes. I've been working pretty hard on some radio patents, and decided to take a vacation. Wanted to get away from the usual summer resort, with its pesky girls and flash sports. Heard that you folks up here didn't like any of that sort of nonsense, so I came up. Looks like just what I wanted. You don't get many strangers around here, do you?"

"Nope. Two, three drummers; 'sabout all. Mostly we keep ourselves to ourselves. Queer duck came through here 'bout six months ago, though. Fellow 'bout your age, too. Got off Number Four one morning, and had the confoundest mess o' boxes put off the baggage car—"

The station agent interrupted. "Ten big wood cases, twenty small boxes, three big trunks. They was all marked 'fragile,' too. A body'd think they was full of eggs, the way he fussed. Wanted to know if they'd be safe till next morning. 'Sif anybody wanted to touch his old boxes. They was danged heavy too. And not a crack in 'em anywhere that a body could look through."

"Didn't stop here mor'n a half-hour." Simpson took up the tale. "Hired him a flivver from Jenkins' livery stable, hauled out a map he had, then shot off up Black Mountain. Couldn't make out what he wanted up there. Nothing but woods, and the old mill. Nobody lives

there. Ain't been anybody up that way since Old Man Thompson died and the mill at the falls shut down.

"He came back next day, and got him a flivver truck at Jenkins'. Smith here, and Tom Durkin's boy helped him load his boxes. But he wouldn't take any one along to help him unload. Ned Durkin told him he wouldn't charge nuthing: just wanted the ride. But the stranger cussed and swore. Said he didn't want any—any—"

"Interlopers," supplied the railroad man.

"That's the word," Simpson continued. "Didn't want any o' them. 'Spose he meant he could wrassle them cases himself. Waal, anyways, he drove off up to Black Mountain again. Brought the truck back the next day. Since then one one's seen hide nor hair o him."

The station agent could repress himself no longer. That his brother gossip should enjoy the retailing of the most thrilling episode in the history of the town was unbearable. He burst out—abandoning his usual slow drawl for a rapidity of utterance which effectually shut Simpson off.

"Nope. Nobody's seen him. Couple of us took a walk up the mountain Sunday after he got here. Land around the falls was posted: Private Property. Keep off, this means you. We didn't pay no 'tention, them signs is usually to scare hoboes. We went right on in. Hadn't gone more'n ten feet when we heard a shot. John swears he felt the bullet part his hair. You kin bet we run. The constable said a man had a right to shoot to keep trespassers off'n his land. But that gink better not come to town when John's around!"

Buck could hardly conceal his excitement. Surely this tale of the mysterious stranger confirmed the tattered map that had brought him to Birdkill. But he dared not give the gossips a hint of his suspicions. If the mysterious stranger were indeed Jim. Ruth was up there with him. Perhaps she was still unharmed. The organization of a posse, a mass attack, might precipitate whatever danger threatened her. He must move carefully.

"Certainly a strange story," he said, as indifferently as he could. "But there may be some reasonable explanation. Maybe the stranger is just someone like me, out for a rest away from people. As long as he doesn't bother you, I'd leave him alone. How's radio reception around here?"

"That's another funny thing. For about three weeks no one around here's been able to get anything but static on his set. Before that we could get New York, Schenactady, an' even distances like Chicago clear as a bell. No one kin make it out."

Another link in the chain of clues! "Well, well, you don't say! That's right in my line. I'll have to look into it while I'm up here. Well, I'm for bed. See you tomorrow!"

Once in his room, Buck threw himself across the bed. At last he was hot on the trail. He must carefully plan his course. This was no ordinary criminal with whom he had to deal. Weird things were happening up there on Black Mountain. A scientific genius perverting his knowledge to evil ends. An unscrupulous monster was wielding a mastery of unknown forces. One misstep, and all would be lost. For himself, Buck was not perturbed. But Ruth, laughing-eyed Ruth, what of her? A groan escaped the anguished man.

This wouldn't do. He must plan calmly, thoroughly. Well, the first thing to do was to find out just what was going on up there. Only way to do that was to go and see. By Jove, he'd start right now! Buck sprang up, then stopped short. Wait a minute. Mustn't go off at a half-cock. Suppose he got into trouble up there. Was shot, or captured, Who'd know all that he'd found out? Must get somebody else. Who? None of these yokels. He'd have to get Riley!

"But Riley, in spite of his brains and guts, is a policeman He'd want to bring up a mess of police, or state troopers. Got to avoid that at all costs." Buck was thinking aloud now.

"But I can't trust any one else. I'll chance it. I think I can make him see reason. Now to get him. Can't phone or telegraph. Don't want these hicks spreading tales all over town. Wait, there's a midnight train to New York, and a six o'clock back. That's it. I'll run down and be back in the morning."

FOUR O'CLOCK. The stertorous snores of Detective Sergeant Riley shook the house. Suddenly the shrill alarm of the doorbell cut through his dreams. Instantly he was wide awake. "What the—must be a riot call. Those Reds, I guess." By this time his door was opened. "Buck Saunders, by all that's holy! Got something? Found her? Quick, man!"

"Nothing definite yet, Tim. But plenty's going to happen in the next twenty-four hours or I miss my bet. May I come in?"

"Surest thing you know. Come into the kitchen, if you don't mind. We can talk there without disturbing the family. Just a minute while I tell the missis there's nothing to get excited about. I get these early morning calls once in a while, and the old lady's always thinking I'm being called out to be murdered."

Riley was gone but a moment.

"Now spit it out, young fellow. And it'd better be good to excuse your getting me out of bed at this hour."

"It's good, all right. It's the break at last. Tim, I think I've found the headquarters of the gang we're after! I haven't got an awful lot yet, but something tells me I'm on the right trail at last."

"Come on, come on! I'm busting with curiosity now."

"Wait. Before I tell you anything I want you to promise me that you'll let me run things, or that you will forget everything I tell you."

"I thought you were assisting me. Now *you* want to be boss. That's what comes of letting a civilian in on police work."

"Listen, Tim, you know me well enough by this time to know that I wouldn't ask this unless this was good reason. Do you promise?"

"All right, all right. I'll promise."

Concisely Saunders told him the entire story. Riley listened with growing excitement.

"By the saints, that does sound like the real thing! Your clues are mighty slim, but I've got the same feeling you have. Well, we'll get the troopers and surround that place on the mountain, then go in and find out what's up!"

"No, Tim, that's just what we won't do. If I'm right, Ruth's in there. Any display of force, and Jim will take it out on her. I knew that's what you would want to do; that's why I exacted that promise from you."

"What then?"

"I'm going in there alone. I need your help. If I lose out, somebody else must carry on. This horror must be stopped. But Ruth comes first with me! I want you to come up there alone with me, and then we'll work it out together."

"But the regulations—"

"Blast the regulations. Tim, if you're the man I think you are, you'll forget that you're an officer of the law and do what I ask. I know I'm asking you to risk your job. I'm asking more. I'm asking you to risk your life. What about it? Are you man enough to do it?"

No one with a drop of Irish blood in him could resist that challenge. Riley stretched out his huge paw. "You win, Buck. I'm with you."

The two shook hands on that.

"Now, listen," Saunders spoke, tensely. "I'm going right back. But we can't do anything till dark, he's evidently on guard. So you leave on

the six p. m. Here's the plan as far as I've gone."Saunders went on for a few moments.

"Got that? All right. I've got to go now. See you tonight."

The door closed on his retreating form.

BACK AT BIRDKILL, Buck spent the day familiarizing himself with the scene of the coming expedition. A dirt road, meandering westward from the hamlet, passed among three or four small farms, then plunged into the darkness of a thick wood. Almost immediately it began to climb up the steep slope of Black Mountain. Now parelleling the road, now wandering far afield, a sizable stream ran rapidly on its way to the Hudson and the sea.

Having ventured past the last farm, Buck found that the road gave little sign of recent use. True, there were deep-worn ruts, but these were remnants of the days when there was a busy flour mill at the falls above. He had learned that this enterprise had been abandoned years before. All that remained, he was told, was the dilapidated structure and an almost demolished water-wheel.

Saunders' walk ended when he saw the first of the warning signs the mysterious stranger had posted. Buck had no desire to arouse his quarry's suspicions, to place him on guard. The information he had thus far obtained would be sufficient till night came to veil his movements.

The afternoon of waiting, back in Birdkill, dragged on interminably. Horrible thoughts of the weird figures attacking the countryside, of the anguish Ruth must be undergoing, crawled like maggots through Buck's brain. This idle waiting was unbearable.

At last dark fell. Eight o'clock, and Buck heard the clangor of the arriving train. *Thank God that's on time! Let's see, Tim dropped off at North Valley, five minutes back. Cross-country it should take him twenty-five to get here. A quarter of an hour more, then we can get busy.*

Fifteen minutes passed by. Buck, waiting impatiently at his open window, heard at last the *thump-thump* of the heavy-footed detective echoing in the deserted street. A dark figure paused uncertainly below.

"All right, Tim, be right down," Saunders called in a low tone. One last look at his revolver, then Buck was out in the street.

Here in the sleeping street of the little village, Tim's garb, revealed in the dim light of a half moon, was incongruous indeed. From the heavy-soled shoes of the patrolman to the brown derby perched precariously

on the back of his head, the detective was redolent of the great city. In spite of his excitement Saunders grinned broadly.

"Hello, Tim. Glad you're here at last. Let's get out on the road before we wake the hicks!"

The purlieus of the town were soon passed. The two paused.

"Well, what's the lay, Buck?"

"We're going up that mountain. The old mill is about halfway up. Then we'll see what's next."

"Say, what's the matter with the lights? Powerhouse break down?"

Saunders laughed. "I'm afraid they don't light their roads as well as we do on Fifth Avenue, Tim. No,we'll have to depend on old Luna up there, and our flashlights."

"Well, I suppose what's gotta gotta, but I'd sure like to see a couple of lamp posts. Got your gat?"

"Here it is."

"Throw out those cartridges and take these. I've been working at them all day."

"What on earth have you got there?"

"Silver bullets."

"Silver bullets! What's the idea?"

"Can't kill banshees with lead. That's been our trouble all along. Just remembered today what my grandfather told me. Only thing that's any good is silver bullets."

Saunders smiled covertly. "All right, if it'll make you feel any better. But let's get going."

The two walked on. Deep silence reigned beneath the trees. Only the far-off shrilling of the crickets broke the silence. It was very dark here in the woods. Barely enough moonlight filtered through the ever-arching trees to show the path. The peace of nature's night gave no hint of the dread not far off.

"Hush, what's that?" A sudden whisper came from Riley.

Ahead there was a faint humming sound, mingled with the rush of waters.

"Sounds like a dynamo," Buck said at last. "Shouldn't wonder. The disturbances of the radio sets around here speak of some electrical operations at the old mill. We'll see."

At long last Saunders spoke again. "We're almost there, Tim. I don't want to go along the road any further. They're probably watching that. We'll get over to the creek. It's only twenty feet to the right of that dead

tree. If we follow the stream it will lead us to the mill. That's safer, I think."

They plunged into the forest. A moment, and the glint of moonlight on the waters showed them the stream.

"Quiet now. Try to make no sound. We're mighty close."

Progress was more difficult now, but at last the overpowering hum told Buck and Tim they were near their goal. The adventurers were crawling now. Miraculously, no sudden crash resulted from Riley's awkward attempts at woodmanship.

Suddenly, they came to a clearing and halted. Clear in the moonlight now they could see the looming structure of the old mill. The great wheel, repaired, was turning rapidly in the stream from which a wooden flume rose up the mountainside where once the waters fell free. The air vibrated with the hum of machinery in rapid revolution. No light came from the building. Far off in the valley a church clock struck twelve.

"What now?" Tim breathed.

"Wait a few minutes, and watch. Perhaps we'll see something."

They waited. No sign of life about the place. Only the eternal turning of the wheel, the roaring of the waters, the hum of machinery.

Suddenly Riley gripped Buck's arm. Tremblingly he pointed to the road, where it emerged from the trees. Movement, figures could be perceived there. The shadowed forms became more distinct. Two men, their automatic movements betraying their kinship to the ghouls of the cemetery at Hopeville. Between them they bore a third. No—it was a body. The trailing arms, the lolling head, spoke unmistakably of lifelessness.

A door in the black wall of the mill opened. A sword of light cut through the darkness, illumined the road, the awesome group. No mistake now. These were indeed the same terrible figures whose apparition had seared the souls of the two who watched from the shadows. The figures entered the door. It shut. Darkness again.

The tender gentleness of the summer night was gone. An ominous horror brooded over the scene.

"No doubt now!" Saunders muttered. "This is what we've been searching for. And Ruth—Ruth is in that devil's den!"

"Hush, boy. Don't lose your head now. You've done great work so far. Pull yourself together. Look!"

Again the door had opened. In the yellow light which streamed forth, one, two, three of the dread figures appeared. They stood there uncertainly for a moment. One reeled backward, as if drawn by some ir-

resistible force. The others ran out, swiftly, but still with that queerly mechanical gait. They disappeared among the trees.

Another form appeared in the oblong of light. More human this. He peered out into the night. Then, with a gesture of despair he vanished within. The door shut.

Saunders could scarcely contain himself for excitement. "That's Carruthers, that's Jim Carruthers. Tim, I've *got* to get in there!"

"Softly, lad, softly. How are you going to do it? There isn't an opening in that place as far as I can see. Only that door, and that's sure to be well guarded. Better let me get the troopers and we'll smash in."

"No, a thousand times no! Can't you get it in your head that Ruth's in there? We can't risk it. I tell you, I'm going in. There must be some way. Perhaps on the other side of the mill. You stay here and wait. I'll prospect around. If I'm not back in an hour, go ahead with you plan. But don't follow me in unless you get help. If these ghouls get the two of us, it'll be all over."

"Well, I've promised. So go ahead. But for God's sake take care of yourself, boy!"

"Now remember. Do nothing for an hour. If I'm not back by then, you're released from your promise."

"Good luck, Buck."

Slowly, carefully, silently, Saunders crept to the base of the house of horrors. Inch by inch he dragged himself along till he had turned the corner. Ah, there was a vertical slit of light! A door? A window? Perhaps only a crack. But at the very least he could peer into this lair of evil.

Even more painstakingly slow were his movements now. Only the faint scrape of his clothing against the side of the mill marked his progress. At last he had inched his way to the beckoning streak of light.

Only a forgotten crack between two planks! Carefully Buck raised himself till he could look within.

A gasp of horror escaped him.

On a long metal slab, hung by chains of insulators from the ceiling, lay the naked body of a dead man. The glassy eyes, the gray pallor, the limpness of every limb left no doubt that the soul had departed from that form. The breast was still.

Suspended above the slab was a spiral copper coil, beneath, another. From one to the other, through the body, a cylinder of blue flame seemed flow. It vibrated with a blinding glare. A strong scent of ozone came

to the watcher's nostrils. He heard the roaring crackle of the electric arc.

Buck could see little else of the room. Yes. Just within the field of his vision the edge of a large switchboard. A hand, grasping the knob of a rheostat, the pointer slowly moving.

Horrible enough was this scene, but more terrible what followed; for even as Saunders watched, *the dead body moved.* The fingers of the left hand, hanging flaccid over the edge of the slab, clenched. A leg was drawn up, jerkily. The head turned from side to side. The cylindrical arc grew more intense. Its roar was deafening.

The whole form was now instict with movement. It shuddered as if in agony. Wave after wave of tremor passed over it. A grin distorted its features. *It sat up!*

The pointer of the rheostat moved back. The blue flame lessened.

The form swung its legs from the slab. It rose, but stood motionless. The arc was gone, but a beam of green light from the direction of the partly seen switchboard gave it a spectral hue. The green light grew in intensity. The figure walked, with the hideous mechanical movements already so dreadfully familiar. The dead was alive!

But no. The unseeing eyes still stared glassily, unblinkingly. Eyes of a dead man, no returning soul looked forth from them. This was not a being wrested from Nirvana. This was still a dead body, invested with a gruesome semblance of life.

As the full horror of what he witnessed crashed into Buck's consciousness, he felt himself seized from behind. Cold, clammy cold, fingers encircled his throat. Bony legs clamped themselves about his. He was borne backward to the ground. The fingers pressed tighter. He could not breathe. He tore at the dead hands gripping him, strove desperately to free himself. But the Thing attacking him had superhuman strength. Buck labored for breath. Those fingers pressed even tighter. His lungs were bursting, an iron band constricted his forehead, great globes of light appeared and burst in his brain. He knew no more.

Endless intersecting circles of colored light danced through the blackness of space. Whirling, ever whirling, they reeled dizzily about. Two eyes, two great dead eyes stare unblinkingly, one green, one blue. The bed is hard, very hard. Buck awoke.

A candle sputtered beside him. He was lying on the floor of a cave. A dark, black cave. Water dripped unceasingly from the roof. How did he get here?

He remembered. Shudder after shudder shook his throbbing body.

How his throat hurt, and his head! Could he escape? He was alone, perhaps unobserved. He sat up. Eagerly he looked about. There was the entrance. A great stone blocked it.

Buck rose. He staggered. He was weak, very weak, but his strength was returning rapidly. He made his way, painfully, to the hole which marked the exit from his rocky prison. With all the force he could muster he tried to move the barrier. To no avail. Even were he in full command of his not inconsiderable strength, this would be an impossible task. He slumped to the floor again, bowed his head on his knees, and groaned in his despair. Fatigue swept over him like a flood. He slept.

Again Saunders awoke. Someone was in the cave! He opened his eyes. Jim! Jim Carruthers stood there, gazing down at him, smiling sardonically. A gleaming revolver was held menacingly in his hand.

"Hello, Buck," a mocking tone belied the welcoming words; "glad you've dropped in for a little visit. Haven't seen you for ages."

Buck sprang to his feet, made as if to leap for Carruthers. An ominous motion of the weapon halted him.

"What have you done with Ruth? You devil!" a stream of vituperation came from Saunders' lips. "If you've laid a finger on her I'll tear you limb from limb, and all your tricks won't save you!"

"Why, Buck, your language astonishes me. Surely that's not the way to talk to an old friend. As for Ruth, she's safe. A little uncomfortable, perhaps, but that can't be helped. You're just in time to wish us joy, for she has graciously consented to marry me."

"You lie, you monster! She'd never marry you. Not while I live!"

"Oh, if that's the only obstacle, it will be removed very soon. You don't think I'm letting you go back with all that you've found out. You'd be dead now if I hadn't wanted to talk with you first. I've got a lot of pride in my achievements, and it will tickle me to explain them to some one who can appreciate their greatness. I can tell you my secrets freely—you'll never repeat them. I can use that splendid body of yours too. You've really done me a favor of walking in here. Thanks, old man!

"A little while ago you were trying hard to get out of this cave. Good thing for you, you failed. Come take a look at my pets."

Carruthers turned. In his free hand was an electric torch. Its beam sprang out and illumined the cave's entrance. The stone was gone; the opening gaped, black, menacing. Saunders, still trembling with rage, moved to it, his captor close behind him.

The sound of many people came to his ears. A fetid stench assailed his nostrils. Something dreadful was out there! Suddenly, the beam

from Carruthers' flashlight sprang out again. It flashed here and there about the huge cavern the light revealed. Hundreds upon hundreds, nay, thousands of the dead-alive were moving about in the darkness. The natural cavity stretched out beyond his vision, yet so great was that throng that each move freely for only three paces. Here in the bowels of the earth a veritable sea of dull gray faces, lusterless eyes. When this horde was let loose, what terror would stalk the earth!

"Nice fellows, these creations of mine, Carruthers said. "When I've perfected my process, they'll be harmless enough. But now, you've come into contact with one or two of them already. I don't think you relished the experience. What do you think would happen if you should walk out there?"

Saunders turned pale at the thought.

"I had that stone put there to protect you, not to keep you in. Now, you've been very curious about my proceedings. Let's get back in the cave and I'll tell you all about it. Won't do you much good, but I've got to talk to somebody. Ruth doesn't know enough about science to understand the greatness of my achievement. And I have nobody else, but those." A wave of his hand indicated the Things in the outer cavern. "Well, will you listen?"

Buck, striving hard to maintain his equanimity, shrugged his shoulders. "I don't suppose I can help myself."

The two went back into the small cave. The candle sputtered. Black shadows loomed menacingly on wall and roof. From without came the unceasing murmur of the foul creations. Then began the weirdest tale ever told.

"When we were at college together, you fellows called me the 'the grind' While you were booting the skin of a dead hog about, or engaging in other invigorating but useless sports, I busied myself in laboratory or library. You were having a good time, I was preparing for life. Now, while the rest of you are out selling bonds to your friends, I am on the way to control a means of cheap labor that will set the world free from toil. One more problem to solve, only one more, and I shall be ready to announce my accomplishment to the world.

"The most expensive item in industry is the cost of labor, and its unreliability. From the smallest farm to the greatest factory this is true. The greatest geniuses of our times have devoted their ingenuity to the devising of metal machines to replace human labor. In the meantime the best, the most ingenious, the most adaptable of machines has been wastefully discarded—the human body. By the millions, by the tens of mil-

lions we cast this perfect machine into the earth to molder and decay, while we spend millions to produce devices not half as efficient. His tone had become didactic. He was a scientist, lecturing to his class.

"This error I set out to rectify. All that was needed was a means to revivfy the human body after the vital principle, the so-called soul, had departed. I knew that this very revivification would halt the process of decay.

"Long years of work, of hope aroused, of terrible disappointment. At last I solved the secret. Here is how I did it.

As I have already mentioned, I have only one more problem to solve. It has been necessary for me to use fresh bodies, in which the processes of decay have not yet commenced. Inexplicably, some remnant of volition seems to linger in the nervous systems. Every now and then one of my subjects rebels, throws off the influence of my control devices and strikes out for himself. The result has been the series of so-called outrages which have aroused the community. Of course I regret these. But incidents such as these are the inevitable accompaniment of scientific progress."

Buck's soul revolted in protest at this callous reference to the horrors which had struck terror into the countryside. "The man is mad!" was his first thought. But no, those were not a madman's eyes. This was merely the cold calculation of the scientist, brushing aside as insignificant everything but matters essential to his work.

"My principal perturbation," Carruthers went on, "over these happenings was that they might lead investigation to this place. But, luckily, thus far my subjects have broken out only when at a distance. Evidently the power of my control beams is weakened by intervening space. Tonight, for the first time, two subjects revolted in my very laboratory, and ran out into the woods.

"When I shall have solved this last problem, I shall publish my

***That no attempt to reproduce Carruthers' process may be made, his exposition of it has been expunged from the narrative. Suffice it to say that the misguided genius obtained his startling results by a development of the well-known phenomenon of galvanization combined with an ingenious adaption of sinusoidal electric currents of extremely high voltage, but minute, amperage. Remote control was maintained by the beam projection of short wave vibrations. A detailed description of the process, together with blueprints of the necessary apparatus, have been deposited in the secret archives of the War Department, to be utilized only in a national emergency of the most desperate nature.— THE AUTHORS.**

results. Then I shall be prepared to rent out to farmers and to industry laborers who will not tire, require no food, demand no wages. Can you realize what a Utopia the world will become when this happens?"

"Utopia—a vertiable Hell, you mean!" The amazed listener could no longer contain himself.

"Ah, there speaks the primitive, the worshipper of the human body. I suppose I shall have to contend with a lot of that sort of sentimental drivel. But when the benefits of my great scheme shall be realized, that sort of prating will be forgotten.

"That cavern out there is my warehouse. The old mill is my factory, my raw material comes from the cemeteries of the world. You are witnessing the birth of a new industry."

Saunders was trembling now with rage. The man's callous attitude toward the unspeakable thing he was doing sent his blood into a boil. If he could but catch this fiend unawares, get his hands about that throat! He would risk it. But no, that menacing horde out there. Ruth at the mercy of those monsters, called from the grave! Craft might accomplish what force could not.

"Truly a great plan," he said, as calmly as he could, "but of course it takes a little while to get used to the idea. But I can't understand why you brought Ruth here. What have you in mind?"

"This work of mine will take years. I must have a son to carry it on. Long ago I selected Ruth as my fit mate. My brain, her marvelous body—what a combination that will make! She could not understand. She preferred you, a brainless playboy. So I took her, as I take the bodies I need in my work. She still fights me off, still dreams that you will rescue her. When I show her your dead body she will give up that foolish hope, and yield to me. Meantime, she is locked in the old office of the mill, as comfortable as she will let me make her.

"As for you, you have served your purpose now. I needed some partly intelligent individual to tell my story to. Now I shall rid myself of your impudent interference in my plans. In a little while you shall be dead. And I shall have another unit to store in my warehouse yonder."

"You're very pleasant."

"Pleasant or no, that's my last word. Don't fear, your death will be an easy one. I want an absolutely uninjured corpse for a test I have in mind. Don't try to go out. Only I, and their own kind, can pass safely through that cavern. Good-bye."

A mocking gesture of the revolver in his hand, and Carruthers was gone.

"MY GOD! WHAT HOPE have I now?" Buck was talking aloud in his horror and despair. "That cold scientific machine will carry out his threats."

Encompassed by such dread things as his reeling brain could only partly conceive, Buck reverted to the simple faith of his childhood. He knelt there on the damp rock, covered his eyes with his hands, and sent his soul out into the infinite in prayer.

A sound startled him. He looked up.

Bending over a tank of gas in the corner was one of the dead-alive. That was to be the manner of his demise. Poison gas. The gray hand closed about the valve, the form straightened.

A shriek burst from Saunders. *"Father!"*

By some strange twirling of the Wheel of Chance it was the body of his own father that was to take the agonized lad's life. What climactic irony had brought this to pass?

"Father!" Again the agonized shriek burst forth. *"It's I, Hartley! Your son! Don't! Don't turn on the gas! Father!"*

What is this? A gleam as of some dim intelligence lights the lack-luster eyes. The hand drops from the valve. The pale features work work convulsively. Two arms go out, as in entreaty. The form drops to the ground. Is still!

By some strange alchemy of nature, the revivified body of Buck's parent had felt the call of its own. Kinship had broken the strength of the weird power which had held this poor corpse in its thrall. The crowning crime had defeated its own ends. The miracle for which Buck had prayed had come to pass! For the present, at least, he was saved.

Trembling, exhausted by the ordeal, Buck lay on the hard rock. He could not mourn the father whose body lay so close; rather he was glad that that body was at last at rest. His thoughts turned again to the girl whose agonized cry for help had brought him here.

"How to get through that cavern, through that mob of dreadful Things? How to get to the mill and Ruth? I must think, think fast. Wait a moment. What was that he said? 'Only I, and *their own kind*, can pass safely through that cavern!' Perhaps, perhaps I can simulate them, fool them. It's a terrible chance, but I must take it."

Saunders went to the mouth of his cave and peered cautiously out. Day must have come. Far off he could see a faint glimmer of daylight. A faint illumination dimly lit the crowd of dead-alive, seething with the noise of many waters. He shuddered.

Back in the cave again, he practiced for a moment the flaccid pos-

Testing each step, Buck silently crept upward—to what new horrors? Scarcely a creak of the old wood gave token of his passage. At last he reached the top, pressed cautiously on the trapdoor there. It gave at his touch; thanks be it was not barred. Slowly, slowly, he raised it, listening intently the while. No sound came to alarm him. Now the opening was large enough to admit his head. He peered about.

Directly ahead of him was a door. Old and faded, he could still decipher the letters, "Office." So near was his goal! And the key was in the door! Again he listened. Only the hum of the generators somewhere behind.

Even more cautiously than before he raised the trap a little. He could squeeze through the opening now. At last, he was through. Softly he crept to the office door, reached up, slowly turned that providential key. ture, the mechanical walk, of Carruthers' slaves. Then, gathering his courage with tremendous effort, he ventured forth.

Would the subterfuge work? Would he succeed in working his way to that distant light? Or were these dread Things waiting till retreat was impossible before they leaped on him? The tension was terrific. Hands of iron constricted his heart. Cold beads of moisture stood out on his brow. Why not try a desperate dash? No. Before he could run ten paces these gray forms would be upon him, would overwhelm him, rend him, screaming, into little bits. He forced himself to down that nigh irresistible impulse, to jerk slowly forward in the very gait of the dead-alive.

Years passed, it seemed. Even nearer grew that patch of light. Ever tenser the shuddering fear of the horrors about him. Once a cold hand brushed his. He stood stock-still. The hair at the base of his neck bristled in ancestral fear. But the form passed on.

At last he reached the threshold of the door from which the light came —passed over it—fell fainting on the floor. He was through!

A moment Buck lay, his senses reeling with unutterable relief. Then he pulled himself together. His task was but half accomplished. He looked about him.

He was evidently in the basement of the old mill, the walls were foundation stones. High up on one side a window gave entrance to the blessed sunshine. At the end was a rickety staircase. From somewhere above came the familiar hum of machinery.

"Locked in the old mill office. That's where he said she was. Well, that's somewhere above. Perhaps near the head of those stairs. Here goes."

Slowly, slowly he turned the knob, pushed open the door, slid into the room, closed the opening behind. Then only he dared to breathe, to look about.

The room was dark, the one window boarded. But through a chink in the boarding one only beam of light streamed through the dusty air. Buck's eye followed it. See, the ray rests on a face, a well-remembered face. Ruth lies sleeping there!

Saunders tiptoed lightly to the rude bed on which his sweetheart lay. Gently he pressed his palm against those sweet lips, swiftly bent and kissed her brow. The eyes flew open, stared in fright, then lit up with unutterable gladness.

"Quiet, dear. Not a sound!" Buck whispered, then removed his silencing hand.

"Buck, dear, at last you've come. Thank God, thank God! Oh take me out this terrible place. Kiss me, and take me away."

Two forms locked in close embrace, their danger forgotten in the bliss of reunion.

Gently Saunders disengaged himself. "Are you all right, dear?" he whispered. "Am I in time?"

"Yes, he had been gentle enough. But take me away. Quickly, dear, quickly!"

"Only a moment now, dear heart, and I'll have you out of here. That window—"

"Not so fast, now so fast!" a suave voice came like the crack of doom. Buck whirled about.

There in the doorway stood Carruthers, revolver in hand, a grim scowl on his face. "I see my plans have slipped again. What happened?"

"None of your business, you devil!" Saunders snapped.

"Well, no matter. But you didn't think you could get away with it, did you? Luckily, after those two subjects got away last night I rigged an electric eye* across this doorway, to warn me if one of them should try to enter this room. Forgot the key, though. The alarm rang just now and I hurried down. Didn't expect to find *you* here.

***A contrivance consisting of a photo-electric cell actuated by a beam of light. The momentary interruption of the beam by an object passing through it causes a change in the resistance of the cell to a current passing through it, which change, through a system of relays, may be utilized to actuate any electrical device, in this case an alarm. First utilized in 1930, this invention is now extensively used.— THE AUTHORS.**

"And now, young man, I'll settle you myself. So say good-bye to my future wife. When I count ten I'll shoot. One—two—thr—what's that!"

A tremendous crash had sounded from without. Carruthers, startled, turned toward it. Before he could look back, Saunders had leaped across the floor, seized the revolver with one hand and its owner's throat with the other, and a fierce struggle was begun.

Crash, crash, crash. A gust of cold air blew in. Somewhere a door had given way. "Buck, Buck, are you here?" Riley's voice came in a great shout. "Buck!"

"Here, Riley, this way!" Saunders, for the moment in the ascendant, managed to shout.

The thumping of many feet came from across the mill floor. Into the room first Riley, behind him four men in green uniform, revolvers in one hand, axes in the other. Quickly they dragged the combatants apart, subdued and handcuffed the cursing Carruthers.

"Thank God you got here just in time!" Buck, dishelved, bleeding, gasped. "I've never been so glad to see anybody. Another few seconds and you'd have been too late."

"Are you all right, boy? Sure?"

"O. K., Riley. And here's Ruth, unharmed too!"

"That's great! I'd made up my mind I'd never see either of you alive again. I waited that hour, heard a scuffle once, but obeyed orders and stayed where I was. When time was up I scouted around, couldn't see any trace of you, then tore off for help. I ran down that road, ran till my lungs were fair busting. I'd arranged to have these boys wait just the other side of Birdkill. They had a car, but halfway up the mountain, she went dead. We ran the rest of the way, just got here. Didn't stop to ask permission, but just crashed through the door with our axes."

"Best thing you ever did in your life. Now let's get busy. Somewhere around are the foul contraptions invented by this man. Get your axes and we'll smash them."

"Wait." For the first time the prisoner spoke. "I'm licked, I see. They're all gone, my dreams. You win, Saunders. The world's not ready for me yet. But, if I can't do the good I aimed at, I don't want to do more harm. Out in the country roundabout are thousands of my subjects, hidden away. If the power is cut off suddenly they'll drop and rot where they are, in cellars, hotel rooms, hidden caves. Disease will spread from their decaying carcasses. You must get them back here."

"You're not trying more tricks, are you?" the detective questioned.

"No. I swear by Science, my holiest thing. I'm licked and I know it. Take me to the switchboard and I'll tell you what to do."

"I believe him, Tim," Buck interposed. "Do what he says. Ruth, you stay here and lock the door."

"No, my dear. I cannot stay here alone any longer. Don't leave me!"

"Then come with us."

The odd procession moved to the room first seen by Buck. A mass of electrical machinery filled the room.

"All right, Carruthers, tell us what to do. And God help you if you try to put over anything." Riley grimly twirled his automatic.

"Throw the third switch in the top row. That will call them all back.

Saunders grasped the handle of the massive switch, and sent it home.

All over the neighboring states weird figures appeared. From cellars, and hovels, from caves and deserted farmhouses they came. The pallor of the grave was on their faces, their arms swung flaccid by their sides. Unseeing, their lusterless eyes were turned toward Black Mountain. Thousands upon thousands they marched with their stiff mechanical step through the highways and the streets, hurrying to their long-denied rest.

The people looked out on the strange spectacle and shrank back affrighted. There was something about these strange, hastening figures which forbade interference. Not all the people, though. Here and there someone recognized a brother, a parent, a child, buried months before. These ran out into the streets and the roads and strove to stay the onrushing figures. They wept and implored their lost loved ones to remain. But the forms never halted in their swift march. On and on, the summoning hum of the dynamos in the old mill.

And now the road up the mountain was filled with the strange procession, the whole mountainside covered with them. Swift they came to the door from which they had issued forth. In a never-ending stream they poured down the staircase and into the dark cavern. All day the group in the mill watched Carruthers' creation rushing home, till at last the stream dwindled, and the last few stragglers had disappeared in the depths.

Then, at last, the switch was pulled that let the current through Blake's strange devices, and the hum was stilled. Dynamite then, brought during the day by one of the troopers, was placed about, and the fuses lighted. The little group rushed far away, then paused and looked back. A thunderous crash, a blinding flare. Gone was the mill and the madness it hid, sealed forever the cavern of horror.

Riley turned to his prisoner. "Come on now—what's this?" The man was white, a green froth bubbled from his lips.

"I've fooled you at last," a weak voice gasped. "You'll never jail me." A dead form hung from the cuffs that joined it to the troopers on either side.

"Tis better so."

BIRDKILL IS NO LONGER a sleepy mountain village. A great hotel rises there, where rest the hundreds of mourners who come each day to visit the grave of the thousands whose cenotaph Black Mountain is. A tall white shaft is rising on the summit, common monument to those whose bodies were ravished from their former resting-places.

In a little house on Long Island, Ruth and Hartley Saunders strive to forget those weeks of horror. Mainly they succeed, but now and then, at midnight, Ruth screams in her sleep, and Buck wakes, and comforts her.

An Unusual Ghost

SOME years ago the people who lived around Lake Fryksdal, in Sweden, were very much perturbed by a ghost that was said to haunt the waters of the lake. They called it the *sjotroll*, or water-sprite. It would suddenly appear, apparently from nowhere, on the surface of the lake, and any fishermen who were near promptly fled from it in terror, for it was said to be a harbinger of misfortune and they feared something terrible would befall them for having disturbed its abode.

None of those who ever saw the *sjotroll* could describe it clearly. For one thing, they were in too much of a hurry to get away from it to study it closely, and the brief glimpses they did get showed that it was unlike anything they had ever seen before. Some said it had horns like an elk. Others said it reached out bony hands toward them.

Finally, a Swedish lieutenant, who did not believe in ghosts, undertook to investigate the phenomenon. It isn't everyone who has shot a ghost, but this lieutenant finally succeeded in shooting this particular one, and found, to his utter amazement, that it was something that had been part living and part dead.

The living part of it was an enormous pike. The dead part was the ragged and now fragmentary skeleton of a dead sea-eagle, the talons of which were still securely fastened in the flesh of the pike's back.

It was easy to see what had happened. The eagle, soaring high above the lake, had seen the pike and had swooped down upon it with deadly accuracy, fastening its talons firmly in the flesh of the fish. The pike, however, being big and powerful, promptly dived and took the eagle with it. The battle must have been short but decisive. The monarch of the lake was in his own element; the monarch of the air was not, and he drowned before he could get those locked talons loose.

The pike won the battle, but he couldn't get rid of his attacker. He carried the trophy with him until it became a weird-looking skeleton to strike terror into the hearts of the superstitious fishermen as it mysteriously appeared and disappeared on the waters of Lake Fryksdal.

THE STAR CHAMBER

(continued from page 85)

before the Star Chamber. there the defendant was denied jury trial, counsel, and habeas corpus, he was subject to exhausting interrogation or torture, and he was usually condemned to imprisonment or death." This procedure came under the "royal prerogative", as torture had been generally eliminated; it was euphemistically referred to as "examination with rigor", and we find occasions where Queen Elizabeth would order examination, "but without rigor", meaning that torture was not to be employed. Despite the loose definition of "treason", there was something of a limit, however; it was confined to " all actions endangering the life and majesty of the sovereign " (For many years, Elizabeth's throne was very insecure.)

During the reign of Charles I, the Star Chamber was used by the High Church hierarchy, under the direction of Archbishop Laud to deal with ecclesiastical offenders--which included not only priests and laymen within the established church, but also anyone outside who in any notable way dissented from its pronouncements, doctrines, rites, ceremonies, practices, etc. The Star Chamber was also used against secular dissenters who sought to reassert the rights of Parliament against the arbitrary rule of the king. During the course of the long struggle between Charles and Parliament, however, the rule of the Star Chamber was abolished.

It was always an instrument of terror and a perpetator of horrors; it was always above the common law, and while the Tudor-Stuart period was not one we might consider high in civil rights and liberties, nonetheless the law did prescribe certain rights for all. So even though, at first, its intent was to crush over-mighty subjects who had managed to place themselves above the law within their own domains, it became rather soon a political weapon to be used against anyone offensive to the sovereign--and particularly anyone who could not easily be put down within the practices of the common law. Today, when we hear the expression, we think of the *methods* of the Star Chamber before considering the matter of intent; but history has shown that good intent does not justify evil methods, but rather the methods corrupt the intent: the means determine the end, rather than the end justifying the means.

Here in subsequent issues, we will conduct such examinations as you wish in *The Star Chamber*--but without rigor. And full protection will be given to all, meaning that no anonymous denunciations will be allowed, no personal criticism admitted, and the right of the accused to reply will ever be respected. RAWL

(continued from page 5)

to acknowledge that such things can happen and do happen.

Stories based upon forces, events, phenomena, etc., which are generally considered "supernatural", or impossible (at least at present), or unknowable--these come under the general category of the unknown. Even though many claim to know, and there are mountains of evidence for some phenomena (as one writer mentioned, there is more evidence for the existence of vampires than for the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte), these are matters that are not in the general consciousness as established; and "science" does not recognize their existence at all as objective actualities--occurrences which cannot be totally denied are explained away as fraud, delusion, hallucination, symptoms of neurosis, insanity, etc.

It is the second, the "unknown" type of terror story of the past, present, and sometimes, perhaps, the future, that you will find in our pages, for the most part, just as it is the "unknown" type of horror story that you find in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* for the most part. But where MOH has a broad policy, covering a wide range of stories that might be called bizarre, gruesome, frightening, and is not confined to the straight horror tale, this publication will be a little more restricted, just as *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* requires some mystery element in all that appears there.

In effect, this will mean that almost any story here *might* have appeared in MOH, just as almost any story in *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* might have appeared in MOH. And some stories here might have appeared in SMS, too. But *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* runs some stories which just could not be put into *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* or this present publication; likewise, we expect to have some stories here which would not belong at all in SMS.

I cannot hope at all times to fill each issue with stories which each and every one of you agree belong in a terror *rather than* a horror magazine, because although those of you who find this present magazine to your taste thus share some of my own ideas, we just do not agree on all details all the time. I can only hope that if you read a story which you feel is out of place, you will still find it a good story--good enough so that you do not feel cheated.

Many of you have asked that we bring out *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* every month. We should certainly like to be able to do so, but that is not yet feasible. Many of you have asked us to bring out *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES* at least every other month; again, we must regretfully say that the time is not yet right. Meanwhile, we bring you a

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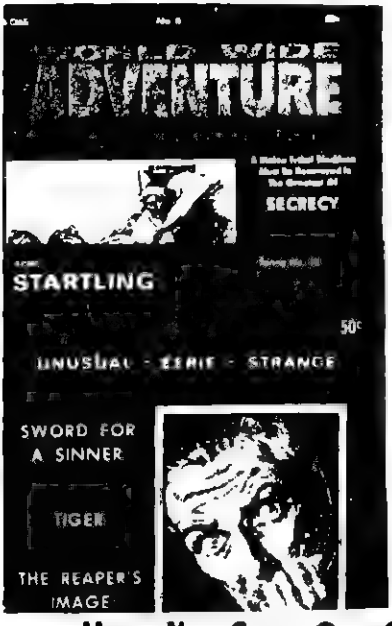
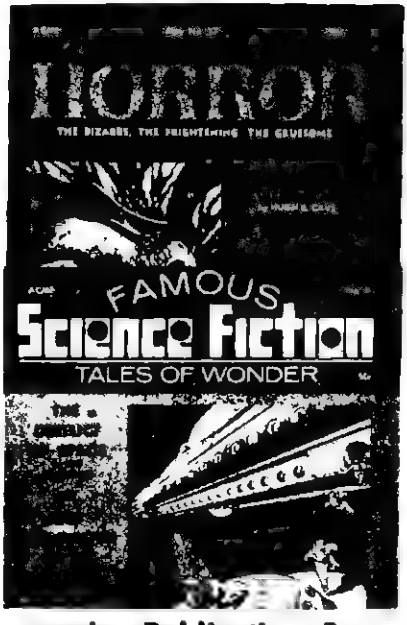
new title, which will follow the policy you have so heartily approved in *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* and *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. reviving generally unavailable stories that appeared in magazines published before 1940, or from books long out of print, or existing only in very limited editions. Some of the stories which those of you who have been reading MOH for years have asked for, and are on our list, may appear here.

We shall also be open to new short and short-short stories, from authors known or unknown who show the knack of combining the feeling of the old tales that veterans among us loved so well with a freshness which results in giving me the feeling that this is not just a re-hash of a story that has already been done too often. I say "me", rather than you, because one of the facts of life is that the first "reader" for whom a commercial author is writing is an editor, or a member of an editorial staff. If some one of the various possible first readers is not convinced, then a story is not going to go any farther. In some publishing houses, a story must go through channels, convincing a hierarchy of readers, before it is accepted; here, for good or for ill, there's only one person to convince, so far as selling your story is concerned.

Of course, I have to put together issue after issue which convinces a large enough number of readers, if the market is going to be here for a writer to convince me again. And that is why I stress the element of reader participation as I do in these magazines. Your letters and com-





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ments and requests, whether the comments be no more than a numbering on the preference coupon or a postcard, whether any further comments be favorable or unfavorable, are useful to me. And for the sake of those who take the trouble to vote, I shall let you know the consensus of the voters on the stories in this issue in a later issue, in *The Reckoning*, when it seems that a sufficient number of ballots on this issue have come in. I keep the polls open as long as I can, but there are still late ballots; and I always regret that they cannot be counted--but they are not ignored.

In future issues, I shall also publish excerpts from your letters, where they seem to be of general interest, as I do in MOH and SMS; and as you know, I do not confine such excerpts to praise. Not only would such a practice be dishonest, but I would be cutting myself off from a possible resource of information by suppressing complaints or adverse comments. I invite them because I want to know how you feel. But some readers may feel that their dislike of a story, etc., is just an individual reaction, and that nothing is to be gained by expressing their opinions. However, if such readers see someone else saying the same thing they felt about a story, etc., they may be encouraged to write in and express agreement.

If no readers let me know about their dislike of a particular story or stories, then I'm left in the dark. If a few express dislike, this tells me something; if many do, this tells me more; and if a majority do, this is a positive warning. Sometimes just a single expression of what you did

not like, when published, will set off quite a flurry of comments. Of course, these may express agreement with you, or just the opposite; in either case, your comment has been helpful, even if you can't win all the time.

Some readers, as well as some long-time fans of this sort of fiction, have noted that the amount of comment editors of this sort of magazine receive is very small in relation to the circulation of the magazine–too small, they say, to constitute anything like a scientific representative sample. This may be, so far as theories go, but sometimes long term and repeated experience is more valuable than theory. Experience–my own as well as reports of the experiences of other editors in the field of fantasy and science fiction–tells me that the theory does not apply in this case.

And, of course, I have a theory as to why the other theory does not apply. Where general magazines, even in these days of diminished magazine reading, have circulations in the hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, even in the best of times for fantasy and science fiction magazine publishing, circulations have never been comparable. In the best of times, however– and even in relatively good times–circulations have been good enough so that such magazines could be published at a profit; and even though other titles in a magazine publisher's list sold better, and made more money, the lesser circulation title was worth keeping. (A satisfied reader of Company A's fantasy and science fiction title might be interested in trying some other brand of fiction; and when you're satisfied with one magazine from Company A, there's a chance

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that you'll try the same company's other magazines first.)

What this has shown is that there is a wider community of interest among the readers of a sub-species of fantasy and science fiction, such as weird terror, horror, and mystery, than will be found among the readers of the general magazines or among the readers of detective story magazines.

While every issue of every magazine which is not, in effect, subsidized by advertising obtains a large percentage of its sale from transient purchasers--the person who buys only once, or only once in a while--the particularly specialized publication is more likely to attract a steady customer. And where the general or non-fantasy type of fiction magazine finds hardly any readers who write letters to the editor, or fill out voting coupons, etc., this field of ours has always attracted a number of active readers. The percentage has varied throughout the years, but the element of activity is always there.

And what I have found throughout the course of nearly thirty years of editing this type of specialized fiction magazine is that there is usually a consensus among the active readers, despite individual differences of opinion, and, the fact that the population of active readers is in constant change.

Some readers will continue to respond more or less regularly for years; others will be active for awhile, then I may not hear from them for years. They are replaced by new active readers--but the consensus remains remarkably similar. It has been thus with *MAGAZINE OF HORROR* since 1963.

The newcomer to the list of active readers very soon begins to sound like an old-timer, not always approving exactly the same stories, etc., that the old-timer approves, but (and more valuable) the same sort of stories--and very often, the same authors. The consensus has approved, throughout the changes of particular names on the letters and preference pages, our revival of the old stories, leavened with new stories, many of them by new writers, and not a few "first sales". There has been an overall consistency of what has been liked and what has been disliked.

Reader approval of this sort does not, of course, always accompany good sales; and in these times, not only these titles of ours, but all the fantasy and science fiction magazines experience difficulty in getting on as many newsstands in as many areas of the country as is desirable. Some very good magazines during the past decade have "failed" simply because the distribution problem could not be solved. However, readers can be of help here--and every little bit helps. If you have found a copy of this magazine, but not in your own area, and your local newsdealer does not carry it, or cannot obtain it, write a letter to us and let us know. Our circulation department cannot guarantee getting this magazine, and its companion publications, on to your local newsstands; but if we *know* there is someone in that area looking for it, then we have a chance of persuading a local wholesaler to try and see if there is a market here. It's like a ball game--there's no guarantee that any particular batter will reach first base, but he positively *won't* reach first if he never gets to bat at all. RAWL

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

Comment — Suggested stories, authors, etc.

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(or better still, write us a letter!)

Reader's Preference Page

(there's more space on the flip side)

Please rate the stories in the order of your preference, as many as possible. Ties are always acceptable. If you thought a story was bad (rather than just last place), put an "X" beside it. If you thought a story was truly outstanding, above just first place mark an "O" beside it. (Then the next-best would be "1").

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